

# New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism

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# New Essays on Ancient Pyrrhonism

*Edited by*  
Diego E. Machuca



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## PREFACE

Editing a collective volume is not usually an easy task because of the challenges posed by trying to coordinate the work of different persons. Despite this, editing the present book has been a pleasant experience, particularly because of what I have learned from reading and commenting on the papers here collected. I therefore wish to express my gratitude to the other seven authors for having remained committed to contributing to this volume and for their patience in the face of delay. I would as well like to thank the editors of the *Philosophia Antiqua* series for their interest in the original project. Warm thanks are also due to Caroline van Erp of Brill Academic Publishers for her help and patience. Finally, I am grateful to an anonymous referee for his helpful comments on the manuscript.

Diego E. Machuca  
Buenos Aires, February 2011





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## INTRODUCTION

Diego E. Machuca

Over the past three decades, there has been a growing interest in the philosophy of the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods, and hence in the different strands of ancient skepticism. Although scholars of ancient philosophy have studied so-called Academic skepticism and the skeptical elements of medical Empiricism, it is especially scholarship on the Pyrrhonian tradition, with its own complex internal transformations,<sup>1</sup> which has undergone a remarkable advance.<sup>2</sup> The renewed interest in Pyrrhonism has resulted in an impressive number of specialist articles and monographs as well as in quite a few new translations of the extant writings of the second-century physician Sextus Empiricus.<sup>3</sup> One of the reasons for focusing attention on Pyrrhonism is to be found in the fact that Sextus, who was one of the leading representatives of the Pyrrhonian tradition, is the only ancient skeptic from whom complete and substantial works remain which provide a detailed account and defense of a skeptical outlook. We still possess the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in three books, *Against the Professors* in six books, and *Against the Dogmatists* in five books.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the other Greek skeptics we have to content ourselves with fragments, testimonies, and second-hand summaries. As

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<sup>1</sup> The ancient Pyrrhonian tradition extends from the fourth century BC to the second century AD. On the significant changes undergone by this philosophic tradition, see especially Bett (2000) and the relevant chapters in Brochard (2002).

<sup>2</sup> This progress in the study of Pyrrhonism has also improved our knowledge and understanding of both Academic skepticism and medical Empiricism, given the strong mutual connections between the three traditions. On their similarities and dissimilarities, see Machuca (2008), 42–50 with references to the relevant literature.

<sup>3</sup> The main monographs are Annas and Barnes (1985), Barnes (1990), Vogt (1998), Brennan (1999), Bett (2000), Bailey (2002), Polito (2004), La Sala (2005), Pérez-Jean (2005), Corti (2009), and Perin (2010). Among the translations of Sextus' works, the following must be mentioned: Annas and Barnes (2000), Spinelli (1995, 2000), Mates (1996), Pellegrin (1997), Bett (1997, 2005), Blank (1998), Flückiger (1998), Dalimier et al. (2002), and Grgić (2008).

<sup>4</sup> What we now know as *Against the Dogmatists* was preceded by a general treatment of Pyrrhonism similar to that found in the first book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. This lost part seems to have consisted of five books. See Janáček (1963), Blomqvist (1974), and Machuca (2008), 31–35.

for Cicero, a mitigated Academic skeptic, neither of the two editions of the *Academica* (his most important work on the philosophy of the skeptical Academy) has survived in its entirety: of the first edition, made up of two books, there remains only the second; and of the second edition, composed of four books, we only have about half of the first.

But the main reason for the current popularity of Pyrrhonism is that Sextus' surviving writings expound a subtle and thought-provoking outlook which scholars of ancient philosophy now widely appreciate and deem worthy of careful consideration. Moreover, the Pyrrhonian argumentative arsenal poses a serious epistemological challenge for present-day analytic philosophers, as it did for early modern thinkers. Indeed, while after Sextus Pyrrhonism seems to have aroused extremely limited interest among late ancient thinkers, in the Renaissance it began to recover the force it had had particularly from the first century BC to the second century AD. This was made possible thanks especially to the publication of Henri Estienne's Latin translation of Sextus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in 1562 and of Gentian Hervet's Latin translation of *Against the Professors* and *Against the Dogmatists* in 1569. The rediscovery and resurgence of the ancient Pyrrhonian arguments was going to play a crucial role in the formation of early modern thought by triggering what Richard Popkin called a "Pyrrhonian crisis".<sup>5</sup> In a similar way, today we witness not only a growing interest in the Pyrrhonian stance among scholars of both ancient and early modern philosophy, but also among epistemologists in the analytic tradition. These have encountered a serious philosophical challenge in the Pyrrhonian arguments against the rational justification of our beliefs, namely, the so-called Five Modes of Agrippa.<sup>6</sup>

The present volume brings together eight essays on ancient Pyrrhonism which discuss issues not previously examined or reconsider old ones from a different perspective, thus proposing new interpretations and advancing the scholarly study of the Pyrrhonian philosophy. Motivating the project was the absence of a collection of original papers entirely devoted to examining in depth a wide range of topics relating to ancient Pyrrhonism, a gap that needed to be filled due to the philosophical

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<sup>5</sup> On the major impact of Pyrrhonism on early modern philosophy, see especially Popkin (2003).

<sup>6</sup> For contemporary epistemological discussions of the so-called Pyrrhonian problematic, see e.g. Fogelin (1994), Sosa (1997), Lammenranta (2003, 2008), Williams (2004), and Klein (2008).

import of this form of skepticism.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a collection taking into consideration the studies published in the last fifteen or twenty years was in order. The new attention focused on ancient Pyrrhonism in studies of early modern philosophy and in contemporary epistemological discussions may be considered a further reason for putting together a volume of original scholarly essays. For in such studies and discussions one sometimes finds certain serious misunderstandings regarding the nature of the Pyrrhonian outlook.

The issues addressed in the essays collected here are diverse: the relationship between Sextus' and Aenesidemus' views on the skeptical interpretation of Plato; the differences between Pyrrhonism and Cyrenaicism; Sextus' discussion of our access to our own mental states; the Pyrrhonist's stance on ordinary life; his uncommitted acceptance of piety; Sextus' attitude towards language; his outlook on ethics; and the relationship between Pyrrhonism and epistemic internalism and externalism. In exploring these issues, some of the papers draw comparisons between ancient Pyrrhonism and contemporary philosophical positions. By identifying certain key differences and similarities, such comparisons make it possible to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the Pyrrhonian stance.

As one might expect, the perspective adopted in the analysis of the foregoing subjects is primarily exegetical and historical. At times, however, the papers take a more systematic approach, discussing the philosophical merits of the positions examined or thinking about the problems they pose. This will make the volume more appealing to those who are less concerned with exegetical and historical issues, or who think that the worth of the history of philosophy lies in its potential to introduce us to questions and problems we have not thought of before or to help us think more clearly about questions and problems addressed in contemporary philosophy by showing us other ways to look at them or deal with them.

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<sup>7</sup> The previous single- or multi-authored collections dealing with ancient Pyrrhonism differ from the present volume in that they: restrict their focus to a specific controversy (Burnyeat & Frede 1997) or to a specific work of Sextus' (Delattre 2006); are devoted also to the other forms of ancient skepticism or the other Hellenistic philosophies (Giannantoni 1981, Voelke 1990, Brunschwig 1995, Striker 1996, Long 2006, Bett 2010); bring together formerly published essays (Brunschwig 1995, Striker 1996, Burnyeat & Frede 1997, Spinelli 2005, Long 2006); examine skeptical thought throughout history, not only in antiquity (Burnyeat 1983, Sihvola 2000, De Caro & Spinelli 2007); or address ancient Pyrrhonism only incidentally (Sinnott-Armstrong 2004).

The volume does not intend to provide a comprehensive examination of the ancient Pyrrhonian tradition. Although some of the essays refer to the outlooks of Pyrrho, Timon, and Aenesidemus, the theme of this collection is Sextan Pyrrhonism. This is due to reasons already mentioned: Sextus is our primary source for Pyrrhonian skepticism, and the philosophical stance expounded in his writings is more challenging and sophisticated than what we find in other sources. It should be noted, however, that Sextus' works contain elements deriving from different phases of the history of ancient Pyrrhonism; what is more, distinct and even incompatible varieties of Pyrrhonism appear to coexist in his writings.<sup>8</sup> Still, it is in the end possible (if sometimes difficult) to identify the skeptical outlook Sextus officially intends to defend and to differentiate it from the positions ascribed to earlier Pyrrhonists by the fragments, testimonies, and summaries found in our extant sources. It will be useful to keep in mind the complexity of Sextus' works and the multifaceted nature of the ancient Pyrrhonian tradition while reading some of the essays here collected.

When, at the end of the first book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus examines the differences between Pyrrhonism and its neighboring philosophies, he discusses the views of those who regard Plato either as a full-blown skeptic or at least as a partial skeptic. The question of the skepticism of Plato was a matter of fierce discussion inside and outside the Academy in the Hellenistic and Early Imperial ages, and it is the object today of intense debate among scholars. In the first essay of the collection, Mauro Bonazzi explores this vexed question within the context of the Pyrrhonian tradition, taking into account the recent literature on the subject. On the basis of a philological and exegetical analysis of the relevant texts, he argues that, in rejecting the view that Plato can be deemed a real skeptic, Sextus is not opposing the interpretation defended by previous Pyrrhonists (in particular, Aenesidemus), but siding with them.

Tim O'Keefe's essay examines the philosophical relationship between Pyrrhonism and another of its neighboring philosophies, namely, Cyrenaicism. The two philosophies seem to have a key trait in common, namely, the claim that our "feelings" or "affections" (πάθη) alone can

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the main tensions detectable in Sextus' extant works, see Machuca (2008), 51–57.



be apprehended. O'Keefe argues that, on closer inspection, there exists a crucial difference between them: the Pyrrhonist refrains from accepting the Cyrenaic account of the nature of our perceptual states and our epistemic access to them, the reason being that such an account rests upon questionable theoretical commitments about which he cannot but suspend judgment.

Next, James Warren deals with a brief argument against the existence of god found in Sextus' inquiry into dogmatic theology in the third book of *Against the Dogmatists*. The argument is in part based on the thesis that knowledge of what pain is like by nature can be acquired only if one experiences this feeling. Warren singles out the primary target of the argument, examines what is involved in possessing knowledge of pain, and explores the rationale for the above thesis and its relevance to understanding the ancient conception of subjectivity. He also lays out the important differences between Sextus' treatment of the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the experience of pain and contemporary discussions of the topic. Sextus shows no signs of being committed to the view that the subject has privileged and incorrigible access to his own private, subjective states as opposed to the kind of access he has to the external world. On this point, the reader will find interesting connections with the subject matter of O'Keefe's essay.

There exists among specialists a long-standing debate about whether Pyrrhonian suspension of judgment (ἐποχή) is restricted to philosophico-scientific beliefs or extends also to everyday or common-sense beliefs. Filip Grgić's contribution is relevant to this debate because it deals with the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards ordinary life. Sextus' remark that the Pyrrhonist lives in accordance with the observance of everyday life is not only a way to respond to the charge that, owing to his skepticism, the Pyrrhonist is reduced to inactivity (the famous ἀπραξία objection). Sextus also sometimes depicts the Pyrrhonist as a champion of everyday life, which seems to imply that his activities and states of mind are those of ordinary people. Grgić explores what conception of everyday life Sextus has in mind when claiming to be its advocate and to what extent this professed advocacy is compatible with Pyrrhonism and entails a reform of everyday life. His main thesis is that, when ordinary beliefs come under Pyrrhonian attack, what is actually targeted is not these beliefs *per se*, but their use as parts of philosophical arguments.

The topic of Harald Thorsrud's contribution partially relates to that of the previous essay. Sextus tells us that the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about the nature and existence of gods. But he also points out

that, in agreement with ordinary life and without holding opinions, the Pyrrhonist says that gods exist and are provident and accepts piety as good. Thorsrud examines whether Sextus' remarks on Pyrrhonian piety are insincere or disingenuous, whether the Pyrrhonist holds ordinary religious beliefs, and whether the performance of pious actions necessarily presupposes the possession of religious beliefs. He contends that the Pyrrhonist can sincerely engage in religious practices by following the way things appear to him and the emotional states he experiences.

Stéphane Marchand explores the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards language by examining the skeptical style of writing that can be identified in Timon's extant fragments and particularly in Sextus' surviving works. The key question is how a Pyrrhonist can write and communicate his outlook if he suspends judgment about whether anything can be taught and learned and, more generally, about whether anything can be known. In order to avoid dogmatism, Timon adopted a literary style characterized by symbolic language and parody. Sextus, for his part, invented a skeptical rhetoric defined by the claim that the Pyrrhonist's utterances are subjective avowals which do not purport to offer an objective description of reality, as well as by a pragmatic use of language and a particular approach to the history of philosophy.

My contribution focuses on Sextus' *Against the Ethicists*, a text which has puzzled some interpreters because of its departure from the official Pyrrhonian attitude of suspension of judgment by apparently defending what can be viewed as a moderate form of ethical realism. Instead of refraining from asserting whether anything really is good, bad, or indifferent, Sextus seems both to deny that anything is such by nature or invariably and to affirm that things are good, bad, or indifferent only relative to different people, moments, or circumstances. I argue that, although at times Sextus does seem to deny ethical absolutism, a careful textual analysis shows that nothing said in *Against the Ethicists* supports the view that he endorses a form of ethical realism.

Otávio Bueno closes the volume with a paper that challenges Jonathan Barnes' claim that the Pyrrhonist is in the end committed to epistemic internalism. Bueno first remarks that Barnes' discussion of externalism actually relies on too simplified a conception of this theory, and that the externalist has resources to respond to the internalist arguments allegedly endorsed by the Pyrrhonist. He then argues that, given that internalism (just as externalism) is a theory about the nature of knowledge and justification, it is a view which the Pyrrhonist cannot consistently embrace. Both externalists and internalists offer arguments in favor of their com-

peting epistemological positions, and given that these arguments strike the Pyrrhonist as equally persuasive, he is led to suspension of judgment. Therefore, the internalist arguments against externalism advanced by the Pyrrhonist are merely dialectical.

It is our hope that the present collection will help attract further attention to the history and significance of Greek Pyrrhonism not only among scholars of ancient philosophy, but also among those interested in the legacy of Pyrrhonian skepticism in early modern and contemporary philosophy.

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A PYRRHONIAN PLATO?  
AGAIN ON SEXTUS ON AENESIDEMUS ON PLATO

Mauro Bonazzi

I

One of the most intriguing features of Early Imperial philosophy is the renewal of interest in the ancients.<sup>1</sup> From the end of the first century BC onwards it is as if philosophers of all schools were persuaded that philosophy somehow came to an end and that the task was now to restore the ancient truth of the great philosophers of the past. This was basically the only point of agreement, the main divergence being about who was the most important master, with each school pleading the cause of the founder of his own school. A consequence of this attitude was that controversies and debates among schools were not restricted to arguments and theories, but also involved historiographical and exegetical problems. The example of Plato is probably the most remarkable. The rich and oscillating history of the Academy provoked hot debates among Platonists on both the real value of his thought and his philosophical allegiances. And it was not only the Academy, for other schools as well claimed a special link with Plato, often in open opposition to Platonists. Such is surely the case of Panaetius and Posidonius, both trying to present Plato as a predecessor of Stoicism. Interesting parallels can also be detected in Aristocles of Messenes' attempt to show that Plato was a predecessor of Aristotle or in the Neopythagoreans' appropriation of him as a follower of the original Pythagorean truth.

Moreover, Plato was not appealing to dogmatists only. On the contrary, in the first Imperial centuries an equally (if not more) controversial issue was his compatibility with skepticism. This issue arose in the Hellenistic Academy from Arcesilaus to Philo of Larissa, who repeatedly insisted on the mutual link between their allegiance to Plato and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hadot (1987), Donini (1993), Frede (1999).

their commitment to skepticism.<sup>2</sup> But the problem did not end with the demise of the Hellenistic Academy. On the contrary, the debate later continued both in the Platonist schools and outside them, in relation to the new form of skepticism inaugurated by the Neopyrrhonist Aenesidemus; and in the third century AD Diogenes Laertius observed that on the issue there was a “great division of opinion (πολλή στάσις) between those who affirm and those who deny that Plato was a dogmatist” (DL III 51). As already remarked, this question was not merely of historical interest, for the controversy on Plato’s views was a way to discuss the philosophical consistency of skepticism. The standard view of most Platonists, from Antiochus to Numenius, was clear: given that philosophy basically consists in doctrines organized in a coherent system, skepticism has nothing to do with it; and given that Plato is the most important philosopher, the inevitable consequence is that he has nothing to share with skepticism either. Neoplatonists will later insist on the same point.<sup>3</sup> In the same direction, but from different assumptions, goes Sextus, our best known Neopyrrhonist. For Plato is a dogmatic philosopher, and thus he has nothing to share with skepticism, or better with the only legitimate form of skepticism, that is Pyrrhonism.<sup>4</sup>

But what about Sextus’ predecessors? Was Sextus reacting against different interpretations or was he rather following in their footsteps? This problem is especially serious with regard to Aenesidemus, and there exists considerable disagreement among scholars regarding his views on Plato. The aim of this paper is to return to this vexed question in order to provide, if not the definite solution (on this issue suspension of judgment is a tempting alternative), at least a plausible reconstruction of the philosophical arguments and their historical context.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. for instance Cicero, *Varro* 43; *Lucullus* 74; Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem* 1121f–1122a with Lévy (1993), Brittain (2001), 169–219, and Bonazzi (2003a), 97–138.

<sup>3</sup> See Bonazzi (2003a), 57–95. Plutarch of Chaeronea and an anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus* (on whom see below) adopted a different view, less hostile to Academic skepticism. But since they clearly reject Pyrrhonian skepticism and account for the compatibility between Platonist metaphysics and Academic skepticism, it is not necessary to discuss their interpretation here; for a more detailed analysis see Bonazzi (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism (PH)* I 225 to be discussed below.



## II

At the end of the first book of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus appends a comparison with other philosophers who have been regarded as compatible or identical with skepticism (that is, in Sextus' view, Pyrrhonism). He discusses the positions of Heraclitus (*PH* I 210–212), Democritus (213–214), the Cyrenaics (215), Protagoras (216–219), the Academy (220–235), and the medical Empiricists (and the Methodists, 236). With some partial exceptions, Sextus constantly argues against such compatibility or identity, and emphasizes the Pyrrhonian uniqueness.<sup>5</sup> The longest and most detailed discussion concerns the Academy, starting from with Plato:

(220) Some say that the philosophy of the Academy is the same as Scepticism; so it will be apposite for us to deal with that too. There have been, so most people say, three Academies: one—the oldest—was Plato's (μία μὲν καὶ ἀρχαιοτάτη ἢ τῶν περὶ Πλάτωνα); a second was the Middle Academy of Arcesilaus, Polemo's pupil; and the third was the New Academy of Carneades and Clitomachus. Some add a fourth, the Academy of Philo and Charmidas, and some reckon as a fifth the Academy of Antiochus. (221) Beginning with the Old Academy, then, let us see the difference between us and these philosophies (ἀρξάμενοι τοίνυν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχαίας ἴδωμεν τὴν διαφορὰν τῶν εἰρημένων φιλοσοφιῶν).

As for Plato, some have said that he is dogmatic, others aporetic, others partly aporetic and partly dogmatic (for in the gymnastic works,<sup>6</sup> where Socrates is introduced either as playing with people or as contesting with the sophists, they say that his distinctive character is gymnastic and aporetic; but that he is dogmatic where he makes assertions through Socrates or Timaeus or someone similar) (τὸν Πλάτωνα οὖν οἱ μὲν δογματικὸν ἔφασαν εἶναι, οἱ δὲ ἀπορητικόν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ μὲν τι ἀπορητικόν, κατὰ δέ τι δογματικόν· ἐν μὲν γὰρ τοῖς γυμναστικοῖς [φασιν] λόγοις, ἔνθα ὁ Σωκράτης εἰσάγεται ἥτοι παίζων πρὸς τινὰς ἢ ἀγωνιζόμενος πρὸς σοφιστάς, γυμναστικόν τε καὶ ἀπορητικόν φασιν ἔχειν

<sup>5</sup> In two cases, Sextus appears to mitigate the tone of the polemic, namely, in the case of Arcesilaus (*PH* I 232–233) and the Methodical school of medicine (*PH* I 236–241). But, contrary to what is sometimes assumed, this does not imply that Sextus is willing to reserve a place as legitimate skeptics either for the first (cf. *PH* I 234: κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν δογματικὸς ἦν) or even for the latter (cf. *PH* I 241, where he speaks generically of affinity, οἰκειότητα, between Pyrrhonism and Methodism).

<sup>6</sup> As Annas and Barnes note, the gymnastic works are those “allegedly written as training manuals for budding philosophers: the ancient categorizations of Plato's dialogues classified several dialogues—among them *Meno* and *Theaetetus*—as ‘gymnastic’ in this sense” (1994, 57 n. 240).

αὐτόν χαρακτηῖρα, δογματικὸν δέ, ἐνθα σπουδάων ἀποφαίνεται ἥτοι διὰ Σωκράτους ἢ Τιμαίου ἢ τινος τῶν τοιούτων). (222) It would be superfluous to say anything here about those who say that Plato is dogmatic, or partly dogmatic and partly aporetic; for they themselves agree on his difference from us. As to whether he is purely sceptical, we deal with this at some length in our *Commentaries*. Here, in an outline, we say, \*\*\* and Aenesidemus (who were the main proponents of this position), that when Plato makes assertions about Forms or about the existence of Providence or about a virtuous life being preferable to a life of vice, then if he assents to these things as being really so, he is holding beliefs; and if he commits himself to them as being more plausible, he has abandoned the distinctive character of Scepticism, since he is giving something preference in point of convincingness and lack of convincingness—and that even this is foreign to us is clear from what I have already said (περὶ δὲ τοῦ εἰ ἔστιν εἰλικρινῶς σκεπτικὸς πλατύτερον μὲν ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι διαλαμβάνομεν, νῦν δὲ ὡς ἐν ὑποτυπώσει λέγομεν † καταπερμηδοτον † καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (οὗτοι γὰρ μάλιστα ταύτης προέστησαν τῆς στάσεως), ὅτι ὅταν ὁ Πλάτων ἀποφαίνεται περὶ ἰδεῶν ἢ περὶ τοῦ πρόνοιαν εἶναι ἢ περὶ τοῦ τὸν ἐνάρετον βίον αἰρετώτερον εἶναι τοῦ μετὰ κακιῶν, εἴτε ὡς ὑπάρχουσι τούτοις, δογματίζει, εἴτε ὡς πιθανοτέροις προστίθεται, ἐπεὶ προκρίνει τι κατὰ πίστιν ἢ ἀπιστίαν, ἐκπέφυγε τὸν σκεπτικὸν χαρακτηῖρα: ὡς γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ἡμῖν ἔστιν ἀλλότριον, ἐκ τῶν ἔμπροσθεν εἰρημένων πρόδηλον). (223) Even if he does make some utterance in sceptical fashion when, as they say, he is exercising, this will not make him a Sceptic. For anyone who holds beliefs on even one subject, or in general prefers one appearance to another in point of convincingness, or makes assertions about any unclear matter, thereby has the distinctive character of a Dogmatist (εἰ δὲ τινα καὶ σκεπτικῶς προφέρεται, ὅταν, ὡς φασί, γυμνάζεται, οὐ παρὰ τοῦτο ἔσται σκεπτικὸς: ὁ γὰρ περὶ ἐνὸς δογματίζων ... τοῦ δογματικοῦ γίνεται χαρακτηῖρος).

(...) (225) Thus it is clear from what we have said that even if Plato is aporetic about some things, he is not a sceptic; for in some matters he appears to make assertions about the reality of unclear objects or to give unclear items preference in point of convincingness.

(*PH* I 220–225; trans. Annas & Barnes)

Sextus' discussion is systematic. First, a classification is introduced of the different phases in the history of the Academy (*PH* I 220).<sup>7</sup> Then

<sup>7</sup> On this classification and its presumed polemical objective (the intent being to break the unity of the Platonic tradition), see Spinelli (2000), 37. A further problem concerns the identity of the anonymous supporters of the identification between Academics and Pyrrhonists. Ioppolo (1994), 92 suggests Favorinus of Arles, but one may also think of adversaries of skepticism such as Epictetus, Numenius, and Galen (just to mention some names), who used to regard the two philosophies as two versions of

begins the analysis of Plato (the “Old Academy”), and three options are taken into account, namely, that he was dogmatic, that he was aporetic, and that he was partly aporetic and partly dogmatic. In fact, the first, that Plato was dogmatic, is not even discussed, but only mentioned (and grouped together with the third option) (*PH* I 221–222); and this for a good reason, since it would make no sense to account for the dogmatic interpretation of Plato in a chapter devoted to discuss the legitimacy of a skeptical interpretation of Plato. The same applies in the case of the third interpretation, which describes Plato as partly dogmatic and partly skeptical (*PH* I 221–222). In fact, this interpretation is not really relevant either. Sextus briefly hints at the reason for it (basically dependent on the classification of the dialogues) and quickly dismisses it as being incompatible with real skepticism (later, however, he will come back to this interpretation, at *PH* I 223).<sup>8</sup> Again, it appears that Sextus was perfectly right, for the presence of some skeptical arguments does not support in itself an overall skeptical interpretation.<sup>9</sup> In addition, it is probable that the anonymous supporters of the third interpretation of Plato’s position would have agreed with Sextus’ conclusion, for it is a fair assumption that such a classification of the dialogues on which the interpretation in question is based was developed with the aim of finding a place for apparently skeptical dialogues in a doctrinal interpretation of Plato.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, it is the second option that really matters (*PH* I 222–223). But Sextus is more reticent than desired; regrettably, instead of dealing in detail with this issue, he refers to another work<sup>11</sup> and simply provides a summary of his view. And here we get to the problem, or better to two problems. In spite of its conciseness, Sextus’ rejection of any compatibility between Plato and skepticism is clear. But does he argue for this view

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the same philosophical mistake (see Spinelli 2000, 44–45; Plutarch however need not be considered, for he probably argued against the unity of the two schools, cf. Bonazzi forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> On this paragraph, see below, note 21.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Annas (1994), 334: “to show that Plato is a sceptic one has to show that he never puts forward doctrines, and that is an implausible position. Showing that here and there he advocates further enquiry, or that he hedges his claims, is not the point.”

<sup>10</sup> Tarrant (1993), 47, 97; Opsomer (1998), 27–33: “The *diaeretic* classification system itself is thus no neutral tool in the epistemological debate, since its very essence implies the acknowledgment of some positive doctrinal elements in Plato’s position.”

<sup>11</sup> On these lost *Commentaries*, cf. Annas and Barnes (1994), 58 n. 241; Decleva Caizzi (1992), 186 n. 42.

in accord or in contrast with his predecessors? And who were precisely these predecessors? The text is corrupted, and opposite emendations have been suggested.<sup>12</sup> With regard to the second question, one name at least is surely attested, that of Aenesidemus. As for the other (the plural οὔτοι shows that more than one thinker was involved), the names of Herodotus and/or Menodotus have been suggested. Indeed, it is difficult to decide; but of the two problems this is probably the less important, for what really matters is Aenesidemus' interpretation, that is, whether his interpretation is the same as Sextus'.<sup>13</sup> Aenesidemus has been often regarded as a former member of the Academy<sup>14</sup> and the first who revitalized Pyrrhonism after centuries of oblivion. Clearly, it is with regard to him that the discussion on Plato matters the most. And this leads us to the other and more urgent problem, namely, to establish whether Aenesidemus supported or criticized the skeptical interpretation of Plato. Indeed, both options have been endorsed in consequence of two opposite emendations of the textual corruption. More precisely, the controversy concerns what depends on the preposition κατά: some scholars proposed a genitive, others an accusative, with two opposite and incompatible results.<sup>15</sup> For, on the first reading, it follows that Sextus argues against the skeptical interpretation of Plato in opposition to Aenesidemus and the others; while on the second reading he argues against that interpretation in accord with them.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, there is another textual corruption, which does not however appear to alter the sense of the phrase: διαλαμβάνομεν, emended either in λέγομεν (by Bekker in the footsteps of the *lectio* of the Latin version *dicimus*, cf. Annas & Barnes 1994, 58) or in διαλεξόμεθα (Pappenheim 1877, 419).

<sup>13</sup> Contrary to the doubts raised by Perilli (2005), of the two names Menodotus remains however the most probable hypothesis. Cf. the valuable remarks of Spinelli (2000), 43–44.

<sup>14</sup> On this controversial issue, see Decleva Caizzi (1992), and the response of Mansfeld (1995).

<sup>15</sup> A schematic list of all the most important proposals runs as follows (cf. Spinelli 2000, 38, for more details). In favor of the accord between Sextus and Aenesidemus, five emendations have been suggested: (1) κατά Μηνόδοτον (Fabricius 1718); (2) κατὰ (τοῦς) περὶ Μηνόδοτον καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (Natorp 1883, 33 n. 2; Mutschmann 1912; Burkhard 1973, 21–27; Burnyeat 1983, 144 n. 22; Decleva Caizzi 1992, 186–187), (3) κατὰ Ἡρόδοτον καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (Deichgräber 1965, 266 n. 2); (4) κατὰ Ἡρόδοτον καὶ (Μηνόδοτον) καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (Zeller 1923, 6 n. 2); (5) καθάπερ (οἱ περὶ) Μην(ό)δοτον καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (Spinelli 2000, 39). In favor of the disagreement between Sextus and Aenesidemus we have (6) κατὰ (τῶν) περὶ Μηνόδοτον καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (Heintz 1932, 30–32; Janáček 1977, 92; Mau 1958; Tarrant 1985, 75–77; Ioppolo 1992, 187 n. 20; Annas & Barnes 1994, 58); (7) κατὰ (τῶν) περὶ Ἡρόδοτον καὶ Αἰνησίδημον (Brunschiwig 2003, 106).

The problem is of greatest importance for the history of ancient Pyrrhonism. And, needless to say, we do not have a solution capable of definitely settling the matter. But this does not imply that suspension of judgment is our only available option. In fact, it does seem to me that the textual and philological evidence points to the direction of the second reading, and that the analysis of the philosophical evidence further confirms this reading.

From the textual point of view, the main reason for defending the view that Sextus is following Aenesidemus is the former's *usus scribendi*. For, unlike the formula *κατὰ τοὺς περὶ* + proper name, the formula *κατὰ τῶν περὶ* + proper name never occurs in Sextus' writings. Admittedly, the *usus scribendi* in itself does not constitute an uncontroversial proof.<sup>16</sup> But it is significant, and it becomes even more important if one adopts Emidio Spinelli's recent emendation, which goes in the same direction and has the merit of providing a technical explanation for the corruption by arguing that we have here an error by haplography: the incomprehensible *καταπεριηδοτον* can be reasonably reconstructed as *καθάπερ* (οἱ περὶ) *Μην*(ό)*δοτον καὶ Αἰνῆσιδημον* (Spinelli 2000, 39).

Thus, a convincing emendation of the text runs as follows:

περὶ δὲ τοῦ εἰ ἔστιν εἰλικρινῶς σκεπτικὸς πλατύτερον μὲν ἐν τοῖς ὑπομνήμασι λέγομεν,<sup>17</sup> νῦν δὲ ὡς ἐν ὑποτυπώσει λέγομεν *καθάπερ* (οἱ περὶ) *Μην*(ό)*δοτον καὶ Αἰνῆσιδημον*<sup>18</sup> (οὗτοι γὰρ μάλιστα ταύτης προέστησαν τῆς στάσεως) ...

As to whether he is purely skeptical,<sup>19</sup> we deal with this at some length in our *Commentaries*. Here, in an outline, we say, as did Menodotus and Aenesidemus (who were the main proponents of this position),<sup>20</sup> that when Plato makes assertions ...

This reading not only brilliantly accounts for the textual errors; it also (and this is what is most important) fits the rationale of Sextus' discussion—or so I will argue.<sup>21</sup> For in Sextus' words we do not find any

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Perilli (2005).

<sup>17</sup> On this emendation, see above note 12.

<sup>18</sup> Or, alternatively, *κατὰ* (τοῦς) *περὶ Μηνόδοτον καὶ Αἰνῆσιδεμον*.

<sup>19</sup> On *σκεπτικός* as opposed to *ἀπορητικός* (the first distinctive of Sextus, the latter belonging also to an earlier, Aenesideman period), see Spinelli (2000), 45.

<sup>20</sup> On the meaning of this phrase, see Spinelli (2000), 52 n. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Lévy (2001), 312, though granting the merits of Spinelli (2000), has raised a further objection in defense of the opposite interpretation, by claiming that if Sextus had sided with Aenesidemus, the reference to the latter should have been inserted after the mention of the *Commentaries*. In fact, this objection does not appear decisive, and the phrase

evidence supporting the alternative reading of Aenesidemus endorsing Plato's skepticism. Indeed, if this were the case, Aenesidemus should have argued in favor of Plato's compatibility with his own Pyrrhonian skepticism, by insisting on the necessity of not endorsing any doctrine (neither as true nor as more plausible), and on suspending judgment. And Sextus for his part should have contested the legitimacy of such an interpretation of Plato. But this is not what we read in the passage:

When Plato makes assertions about Forms or about the existence of Providence or about a virtuous life being preferable to a life of vice, then [1] if he assents to these things as being really so, he is holding beliefs; [2] and if he commits himself to them as being more plausible, he has abandoned the distinctive character of Scepticism, since he is giving something preference in point of convincingness and lack of convincingness—and that even this is foreign to us is clear from what I have already said (ὅταν ὁ Πλάτων ἀποφαίνεται περὶ ἰδεῶν ἢ περὶ τοῦ πρόνοιαν εἶναι ἢ περὶ τοῦ τὸν ἐνάρητον βίον αἰρετώτερον εἶναι τοῦ μετὰ κακιῶν, εἴτε ὡς ὑπάρχει τούτοις, δογματίζει, εἴτε ὡς πιθανότεροις προστίθεται, ἐπεὶ προκρίνει τι κατὰ πίστιν ἢ ἀπιστίαν, ἐκπέφυγε τὸν σκεπτικὸν χαρακτήρα· ὡς γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ἀλλότριον, ἐκ τῶν ἔμπροσθεν εἰρημένων προδήλον). (PH I 222)

Sextus never takes into consideration the possibility of interpreting Plato as a philosopher without doctrines, but rather distinguishes between two different ways of endorsing doctrines, either by maintaining that they are true or by defending their plausibility. Now, the point of Sextus' argument is clear: if Plato endorses doctrines, no matter how he endorses them, he is not a real skeptic; but since Plato endorses doctrines, he is not a skeptic. Clearly, this argument does not appear to be directed against a

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remains clear: Sextus first refers to the more detailed discussion which would have probably contained more than one argument, and then ὡς ἐν ὑποτυπώσει reports Aenesidemus' (and Menodotus') argument, probably because he considered it a good argument. As a matter of fact, this reconstruction would also explain the rationale of the following paragraph and of the digression on Xenophanes, which can be regarded as Sextus' original contribution. This is clear concerning Xenophanes (Spinelli 2000, 46–50) and probably applies also in the case of the discussion of paragraph 223. In a typical way, Sextus first provides the most important argument, and then confirms his point with further arguments. If this is the case, it is not correct to attribute the arguments of PH I 223 to the adherents of the skeptical interpretation of PH I 222, as Ioppolo (2008), 467–468 proposes. As already observed, both paragraph 223 and the digression on Xenophanes derive from Sextus; moreover, the terminological parallels between paragraph 223 and the “dogmatic and aporetic interpretation” (cf. in particular γυμνάζεταιται) further confirm that Sextus is returning to this previous issue, which has nothing in common with the “aporetic” interpretation (cf. *supra*, note 8).

presumably Pyrrhonian interpretation of Plato, for it takes for granted what should rather be a matter of controversy, namely, whether Plato does (or does not) endorse doctrines. Neither is this argument directed against those who maintain that Plato endorsed doctrines by considering them true, which is the first of the three options mentioned at *PH* I 221. This is clearly the dogmatists' interpretation. But if neither radical skeptics (such as Aenesidemus) nor dogmatists are those who defend the skeptical interpretation of Plato, it remains only a third possibility. Clearly, the target are more moderate skeptics, and Sextus' polemic fits very well the philosophy of Philo of Larissa, who, while maintaining that the truth is unknowable, granted the possibility of committing oneself to a view *in propria persona*, with the proviso that they were not endorsed as true but only as probable.<sup>22</sup> This is precisely the second option attributed to Plato in the abovementioned text, and what Sextus explicitly denies on the basis that it is inconsistent with proper skepticism.<sup>23</sup> It is then a reasonable assumption that Sextus was polemicizing against Academic philosophers like Philo of Larissa, who argued for a 'probabilist' Plato: since 'probabilism' is inconsistent with skepticism, Plato cannot be regarded as a skeptic.<sup>24</sup> But if this is the case, it is reasonable to further assume that, in so doing, he was following in the footsteps of Aenesidemus (and probably of Menodotus), and not in opposition to them. For, as is well known and we are going to see, Aenesidemus vehemently attacked the Academic skeptics with the same arguments.

### III

Aenesidemus' opposition to the Academy is well known and all his arguments need not to be discussed here in detail. For the purpose of the

<sup>22</sup> Burnyeat (1983), 144 n. 22.

<sup>23</sup> It is not by chance, then, that the rejection of Plato's skepticism rests on the same argument that will be later directed against Carneades' *πιθανόν* (*PH* I 226–231), cf. Spinelli (2000), 55 n. 40. On Sextus and *πιθανόν*, see further Bonazzi (2003b), 202–214. More in general on Sextus and the Academy, see now Ioppolo (2009).

<sup>24</sup> Against this option it may be argued that Sextus, when explicitly dealing with Philo, does not speak of the *πιθανόν*. But such an objection is not cogent. For Philo also considered the *πιθανόν* (interpreted in a different way from Clitomachus, cf. Cic. *Luc.* 148) decisive for defining his skeptical stance both from a philosophical and a historical perspective; cf. Brittain (2001), 207–219, Bonazzi (2003a), 118–129.

present paper, it suffices to emphasize that the argument used by Sextus against the skeptical interpretation of Plato can be paralleled with Aenesidemus' argument against the legitimacy of Academic skepticism. In his summary of the *Pyrrhonian Discourses*, Photius reports that Aenesidemus attacked the Academics, especially those of his own time, by accusing them to be "Stoics fighting with Stoics" (οἱ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας, φησί, μάλιστα τῆς νῦν, καὶ στωϊκαῖς συμφέρονται ἐνίοτε δόξαις, καὶ εἰ χρὴ τᾶληθές εἰπεῖν, Στωϊκοὶ φαίνονται μαχόμενοι Στωϊκοῖς, 170a14–17).<sup>25</sup> At first sight, this charge may appear to miss the point, for one constant feature of the Hellenistic Academy in all its variants was precisely the anti-Stoic stance. And yet, Aenesidemus' charge is more subtle than it may appear. Indeed, he recognizes that the Academics opposed the Stoics on the value of the "kataleptic impression", the key doctrine of Stoic epistemology (170a21–22). But he also claims that the controversy on the kataleptic impression, in spite of the importance that his Academic adversaries attribute to this polemic, does not suffice to distinguish Academic skepticism from Stoicism. For Academic mitigated skepticism does in fact presuppose the same epistemological background as the Stoics:

How is it possible to recognize that this is true, this false, yet still entertain perplexity and doubt, and not make a clear choice of the one and avoidance of the other? [1] For if it is not known that this is good or bad, or that this is true but that false, and this existent but that non-existent, it must certainly be admitted that each of them is non-kataleptic. [2] But if they receive self-evident katalepsis by means of sense-perception or thought, we must say that each is kataleptic (πῶς οἷόν τε γινώσκοντα τόδε μὲν εἶναι ἀληθές τόδε δὲ ψεῦδος ἔτι διαπορεῖν καὶ διστάσαι, καὶ οὐ σαφῶς τὸ μὲν ἐλέσθαι τὸ δὲ περιστῆναι; εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἀγνοεῖται ὅτι τόδε ἐστὶν ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακόν, ἢ τόδε μὲν ἀληθές τόδε δὲ ψεῦδος, καὶ τόδε μὲν ὄν τόδε δὲ μὴ ὄν, πάντως ὁμολογητέον ἕκαστον ἀκατάληπτον εἶναι· εἰ δ' ἐναργῶς κατ' αἰσθησιν ἢ κατὰ νόησιν καταλαμβάνεται, καταληπτόν ἕκαστον φατέον).

(Photius *Bibliotheca*, cod. 212, 170a31–38;

trans. Long & Sedley with slight modifications)

The text clearly outlines a radical opposition between authentic and false skepticism, the first obviously describing Pyrrhonism<sup>26</sup> and the second the position of the Academy. The mention of ἐναργῶς refers to a cardinal

<sup>25</sup> Translation by Long and Sedley (1987), I, 468–470 (Photius' summary corresponding to testimony 71C).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the description of Pyrrhonian skeptics at 169b21–22, 169b40–170a11, and 170a22–24.



tenet of Philo of Larissa, who used it to show that, even when ἀκαταληψία holds, it is possible to express one's own opinion following what turns out to be persuasive on the basis of the available evidence. And this is precisely what Aenesidemus denied: if evidence is admitted as a criterion, knowledge (or in Stoic terms: κατάληψις) must also be admitted, and skepticism disappears. Be it (Stoic) kataleptic impression or (Academic) persuasive impression, the result does not change: Stoics and Academics do in fact share the belief in the possibility of a contact with reality, which is incompatible with skepticism. In short, Aenesidemus' polemics against the Academy exactly reproduces Sextus' polemics against the skeptical interpretation of Plato: in both cases the defense of Pyrrhonian skepticism involves the rejection of any form of mitigated skepticism like the one endorsed by the last Hellenistic Academics. In one word, Academics are in Aenesidemus' text as δογματικοί (169b39) as Plato is in Sextus' account.<sup>27</sup>

#### IV

The scholars who support the view that some Pyrrhonists interpreted Plato as a fellow Pyrrhonist have also based this view on other testimonies which do not derive directly from Pyrrhonian sources.<sup>28</sup> But these texts do not actually confirm such a view; they rather confirm the validity of the opposite one.<sup>29</sup> The first text comes from an anonymous commentary on Plato's *Theaetetus* (dated to the Early Imperial Era).<sup>30</sup> When commenting on one of the typically Socratic disavowals of knowledge (*Tht.* 150c4–7), the anonymous commentator briefly hints at the question of Plato's skepticism:

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<sup>27</sup> Remarkably, this is also the line adopted by Sextus in the discussion of the Academy which follows that on Plato, cf. *PH* I 226–231; in these paragraphs as well the affinities with Aenesidemus are evident.

<sup>28</sup> Tarrant (1985), 77, followed by Ioppolo (2008), 472–475.

<sup>29</sup> In addition, there is also the passage from Diogenes Laertius dealing with the classification of the dialogues (*DL* III 51). Unfortunately, however, this text does not provide, as already noted (*supra* note 10), any useful information about the classification system developed in opposition to the skeptical interpretation of Plato. In the texts we thus have some arguments against, and not in favor of, this interpretation.

<sup>30</sup> The date of this commentary is controversial, but need not be tackled here. For the purpose of the present discussion, it suffices to remember that it certainly belongs chronologically to the Early Imperial period (around I–II century AD) and doctrinally to Middle Platonism. Cf. Bonazzi (2003a), 179–211.

On the basis of remarks of this kind some consider Plato an 'Academic', in the sense that he does not dogmatize about anything. The discussion will show that, with very few exceptions, the other Academics dogmatize, and that there is only one Academy, since they too hold the most important *dogmata* as Plato. And that Plato had *dogmata* and that he asserted them with conviction can be gathered from his writings (ἐκ τοιούτων λέξεών τινες οἴονται Ἀκαδημαϊκὸν τὸν Πλάτωνα, ὥς οὐδὲν δογματίζοντα. δείξει μὲν οὖν ὁ λόγος καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἀκαδημαϊκοὺς ὑπεξηρghμένων πάνυ ὀλίγων γε δογματίζοντας, καὶ μίαν οὖσαν Ἀκαδήμειαν κατὰ τὸ κακείνους τὰ κυριώτατα τῶν δογμάτων ταῦτά ἔχειν τῷ Πλάτῳ. ἤδη μέντοι τὸν Πλάτωνα ἔχειν δόγματα καὶ ἀποφαίνεσθαι πεποιθότως πάρεστιν ἐξ αὐτοῦ λαμβάνειν). (LIV 38–LV 13; my translation)

A Neoplatonist introduction to the philosophy of Plato, the so-called *Prolegomena in Platonis philosophiam* (around VI century AD) provides an interesting parallel:

Some force Plato into the camp of the ephectics and the Academics saying that he too introduced inapprehensibility. This they try to establish on the basis of what he says in his writings (λέγουσι δὲ τινες συνωθοῦντες τὸν Πλάτωνα εἰς τοὺς ἐφεκτικούς καὶ τοὺς<sup>31</sup> Ἀκαδημαϊκοὺς ὥς καὶ αὐτοῦ ἀκαταληψίαν εἰσάγοντος· καὶ κατασκευάζουσι τοῦτο ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων αὐτῷ ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασι αὐτοῦ).

(An. *Prol. Plat. phil.* 10, 4–7; my translation)

To be sure, both texts are less clear than it may appear at first sight. A major difficulty concerns the presence of terms and concepts distinctive of Pyrrhonism. In the first text, the use of *δογματικός* seems to date back to Aenesidemus, and not earlier; moreover, elsewhere in the commentary terms of a distinctively Pyrrhonian flavor also occur.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, in the second text terms such as ἀμφίβολα (ambiguous) and διστακτικά (doubtful) (*Prol. in Plat. phil.* 10, 8–9) can be paralleled with terms that occur in Photius' summary of Aenesidemus' *Pyrrhonian Discourses* (cf. ἀναμφιβόλως and ἀδιστακτως, Phot. *Bibl.* 169b38–40). And this has confirmed scholars in the view that the supporters of the skeptical interpretation of Plato are Pyrrhonists such as Aenesidemus.<sup>33</sup> But does this terminological parallel suffice to establish this hypothesis? Admittedly, these terminological similarities raise interesting questions. But they do

<sup>31</sup> Between τοὺς and Ἀκαδημαϊκοὺς there is a *rasura* of four characters; a probable integration is νέους, cf. Westerink (1990), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ioppolo (2008), 473, points out καθοριστικῶς, ἰσοκρατεῖς, and ἐξομαλίζειν (LXI 12, 26, 28). Cf. also Sedley (1995), 546.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ioppolo (2008), 472–473.

not necessarily entail that the two texts offer a Pyrrhonian interpretation of Plato. For the situation is more complicated and other hypotheses need to be taken into account. In fact, the Pyrrhonian dependence is not the only possibility; for instance it cannot be excluded either that these terms must rather be traced back to an even earlier period or that they were rather used by the commentator on the *Theaetetus* and the anonymous Neoplatonist, who found them appropriate for the question under consideration.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the testimonies at our disposal are few and one must avoid dogmatic conclusions when confronting texts spanning over centuries, from the Early Empire to the Byzantine Age. Or again it may also be possible that both the commentator and the Neoplatonist author refer to some later thinkers interested in combining Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism; in that case a good candidate may be, just to give one name, Favorinus of Arles, who argued in favor of the compatibility between the Hellenistic Academy and Pyrrhonism.<sup>35</sup> In sum, the possibilities are several and it is difficult to take a firm position on the issue.

But, be that as it may, one point at least is sure, and it is that Aenesidemus cannot be the source. For in both texts the skeptical interpretation of Plato is traced back to the Academy. The anonymous commentator and the Neoplatonist author are both explicit and do not leave any room for doubt: their adversaries, that is the supporters of a skeptical Plato, belong to the skeptical Academy—they defend the legitimacy of Plato's skepticism by insisting on its compatibility with Academic skepticism (Ἀκαδημαϊκὸν τὸν Πλάτωνα; συνωθοῦντες τὸν Πλάτωνα εἰς τοὺς ἐφεκτικούς καὶ τοὺς Ἀκαδημαϊκούς).<sup>36</sup> And this suffices to exclude

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<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in the case of the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*, one must avoid the tendency to overemphasize the Pyrrhonian presence. For even though in the commentary there are terms (besides δογματίζειν) of a Pyrrhonian flavor, it is unwarranted to conclude they refer to the discussion on Plato's skepticism. The mention to Plato's skepticism is introduced not in relation to the verb φαίνεσθαι, cf. *Tht.* 151e2–5 (as implied by Ioppolo 2008, 474), but in relation to Socrates' disavowal of knowledge, a typical theme of the Hellenistic Academy (cf. for instance Cicero, *Varro* 46). The presence of these terms simply confirms that the commentator was informed about Pyrrhonism (just as the presence of Epicurean terms shows that he was informed about Epicureanism); but nothing justifies us to use them as evidence for the existence of a Pyrrhonian interpretation of Plato. To do so would mean to beg the question.

<sup>35</sup> Bonazzi (2003a), 158–170. Against this hypothesis it has been argued that we do not have any evidence of Favorinus interpreting Plato, cf. Ioppolo (2004).

<sup>36</sup> In the second text (the Neoplatonist *Prolegomena*), it may be argued that the reference to the ἐφεκτικοί implies the Pyrrhonists. If this were the case, this text can be used as evidence that in the Imperial centuries there were thinkers arguing for a skeptical

Aenesidemus for the very simple reason that he was not willing to concede that Academic skepticism was skepticism at all.<sup>37</sup> Admittedly, many problems remain, and one may agree that these testimonies do not perfectly coincide with Sextus' *PH* I 223. But it remains uncontroversial that they do not account for an interpretation of Plato as a Pyrrhonian skeptic. On this point at least they agree with Sextus. Therefore, also in this case, we can conclude that we do not have any evidence supporting the hypothesis of a Pyrrhonian Plato.

All in all, and in spite of many difficulties, this is the more reasonable conclusion that we can recover from our general analysis of the dossier on Plato's skeptical interpretation. The idea of a Pyrrhonian Plato does not appear to be a possibility that Pyrrhonists were willing to take into consideration. As Pyrrho and Timon did previously, so later Aenesidemus and Sextus continued (correctly) to regard Plato as part of the Academic tradition and, consequently, denied him any relationship with skepticism.<sup>38</sup> On this point they at least agreed with the many dogmatic interpreters of Plato, ancient and modern.

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interpretation of Plato in connection with the thesis that Academic and Pyrrhonist skepticism are the same or are similar. Again, one may point to thinkers such as Favorinus (cf. *supra*, p. 23). Be that as it may, what remains uncontroversial is that the reference to the Academy suffices to exclude Pyrrhonists such as Aenesidemus.

<sup>37</sup> Commenting on the *Anonymi Commentarius in Platonis Theaetetum* LIV, Tarrant (1985), 73 remarks: "The term [in the phrase Ἀκαδημαϊκὸν τὸν Πλάτωνα] is most likely to have been used by one who was interested in the differences between Academics and Pyrrhonists, and it seems to have been Aenesidemus who pioneered this question." This is correct. But since Aenesidemus pioneered the question not only by stressing the difference between Academics and Pyrrhonists but also by claiming that the Academics were not skeptics, it necessarily follows that it was not him who argued for a skeptical Plato by defining him as an 'Academic'!

<sup>38</sup> If Aenesidemus was really convinced of Plato's skepticism, the reason for his interest in Pyrrho would become very difficult to explain: "It is also difficult to explain why someone who had such a view of Plato and therefore considered him to be a genuinely skeptical philosopher should have subsequently moved over to Pyrrho, a figure who had nothing in common with Plato, and to Timon, whose attitude to Plato was certainly not an affectionate one" (Decleva Caizzi 1992, 186).

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## THE CYRENAICS VS. THE PYRRHONISTS ON KNOWLEDGE OF APPEARANCES

Tim O’Keefe

### 1. *Introduction*

In *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* I 209–241, Sextus Empiricus takes pains to differentiate the skeptical way of life from other positions with which it is often confused, and in the course of this discussion (*PH* I 215),<sup>1</sup> he briefly explains how skepticism differs from Cyrenaicism. It is sometimes alleged, says Sextus, that the two are the same because both say that we “apprehend (*katalambanein*) only our feelings (*pathê*).” Sextus points out two important differences between the Cyrenaics and the skeptic. First, he says, the Cyrenaics posit pleasure as the end, whereas the skeptic aims at tranquility, and does so in a way that involves no commitment to tranquility being by nature good. Second, the Cyrenaics state that the “external existing things” (*tôn ekstos hupokeimenôn*) cannot be apprehended, thus making them ‘epistemological negative dogmatists’ instead of true skeptics, since the true skeptic suspends judgment about everything, including whether in the future one may be able to apprehend the nature of external things.<sup>2</sup>

Surprisingly, Sextus does not mention a third apparent difference between the two. In addition to their ‘negative dogmatism’ regarding the impossibility of apprehending the nature of objects external to the perceiver, the Cyrenaics have a positive epistemic commitment—that we *can* apprehend our own feelings. Although we cannot know whether the honey is really sweet, we can know infallibly that right now we are being

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforward, references to this and other texts will be made using the following abbreviations: *PH* = *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, *AM* = *Against the Professors*, *Adv. Col.* = *Against Colotes*. Translations (sometimes with slight modifications) of *PH* are from Annas and Barnes (2000), and of *Adv. Col.* from Tsouna (1998).

<sup>2</sup> The terminology of ‘epistemological negative dogmatists’ is not Sextus’, but comes from the taxonomy of possible skeptical and dogmatic positions laid out in Hankinson (1995), 13–30. Sextus calls people who deny that knowledge is possible Academics (see *PH* I 1–4).

sweetened (*Adv. Col.* 1120e–f). By contrast, Sextus says explicitly that, as skeptics, Pyrrhonists apprehend nothing whatsoever (*PH* I 200–201). It might be suspected, however, that Sextus does not mention this difference because, on this matter, there really isn't an important difference between the two. Sextus does disavow knowledge, which would seem to include knowledge of one's own perceptual and cognitive states. However, he adds that the skeptic is perfectly able to report how things appear to him, e.g., that the honey *seems* sweet (*PH* I 19–20), and it is crucial for the skeptic that he not abolish the appearances (*ta phainomena*), as following them allows him to live even without having any opinions. So the following two questions arise: (1) Is there a significant difference between the way in which the Cyrenaics think they apprehend their own feelings and the relationship a Pyrrhonist has with his appearances that allows him to report on them, or is the difference merely verbal? (2) If there is a significant difference, what is its source?

I will argue that, even though many considerations seem to point to the difference between the two being merely verbal, there actually is a significant difference between their positions, and that uncovering it will help us to increase our understanding of both the Cyrenaics and the Pyrrhonists. First, I will give the arguments for why we should think that the Cyrenaic and Pyrrhonist positions do *not* differ significantly. Then, I will rebut these arguments and show why there are important differences between the two.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. *The Case for the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists Not Differing Significantly*

The way in which Sextus describes how the Cyrenaics and Skeptics *do* differ in *PH* seems to indicate they do *not* differ when it comes to our acquaintance with our own affections. Sextus starts out this section of *PH* by observing that some think that the Pyrrhonists and Cyrenaics are the same because both affirm that only one's feelings can be apprehended, and then he lists two ways in which they do differ, without saying that

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<sup>3</sup> When I speak of the 'skeptical', the 'Pyrrhonist position', and the like, I mean to refer to the version of Pyrrhonian skepticism that Sextus lays out in *PH*. I am not concerned with, and I will not argue about, how the position of *PH* relates to the positions that Sextus lays out in his other works, or with the skeptical positions of the historical Pyrrho or Aenesidemus. See Bett (2000) for extended consideration for those sorts of issues.



the original point of identification is inaccurate. This gives the strong impression, as Tsouna puts it, that Sextus is “willing to concede that a common point between the two groups of philosophers is that they both consider the *pathê* alone apprehensible, *katalêpta*” (Tsouna 1998, 58; see also Fine 2000, 206–208 and 2003, 379–380).

Sextus never states that he himself shares the view that the Pyrrhonist and Cyrenaic are the same in this regard, so this argument from silence is not decisive. This purported similarity between the two need not be one that Sextus himself accepts. Instead, it could simply be what *others* say about them. Nonetheless, it gives a good *prima facie* reason to think that Sextus doesn’t see the two as differing on this matter. Furthermore, the Pyrrhonian and Cyrenaic positions seem to share many important similarities, when it comes to the *pathê/phainomena*:

– *Characterization of the pathê/phainomena.* The Cyrenaics say that the *pathê* have an intrinsic and irreversible clarity (*enargeia*) (*Adv. Col.* 1120e). Sextus says that the skeptic is happy to concede that honey *appears* sweet (*PH* I 19), and that nobody argues over whether things *appear* to be this way or that; instead they argue over whether things *are* as they *appear* (*PH* I 22). In a number of places (e.g., *PH* I 13 and 20), Sextus contrasts the *phainomena*, to which the skeptic acquiesces, with the *adêla*—the unclear or non-evident objects of scientific investigation and dogmatic theorizing—about which the skeptic suspends judgment. This contrast implicitly paints the *phainomena* as clear and evident.

– *Refusal to go beyond the pathê/phainomena.* The Cyrenaics say that we run into problems when we go beyond the *pathê* and try to make inferences on their basis about the objects that are the cause of the *pathê* (*Adv. Col.* 1120c–f, *AM* VII 191–192, 198–199). Pyrrhonists say the same thing about the *phainomena*, that we have no good reason to draw inferences about how things are on the basis of how they appear (e.g., at *PH* I 13–15, 19–20, and the discussion of the Ten Modes at *PH* I 35–163, among many other places). Furthermore, the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists give similar types of considerations to undermine these inferences. For instance, they appeal to the relativity of perceptions caused by the same object and the apparent dependence of one’s perceptions on one’s bodily state (such as honey tasting sweet to me but bitter to somebody who is ill), and the lack of any criterion on which to judge which (if any) of the conflicting appearances is veridical. They even draw similar conclusions from arguments that proceed from perceptual relativity. Unlike Democritus, they

do not say that the honey itself is neither sweet nor bitter, and unlike Protagoras, they do not say that the honey is sweet for me and bitter for the ill fellow.<sup>4</sup> Instead, both the Pyrrhonists and Cyrenaics profess ignorance about which property, if either, the honey itself has—although the Pyrrhonist says merely that for now which it has is unknown to him, whereas the Cyrenaic claims it is unknowable.

– *Epistemic embrace of the pathê/phainomena.* The flip side of the eschewal of beliefs regarding the nature of external things is an embrace of what is apparent: one's own *pathê* or the *phainomena*. Although Sextus does sometimes say that the skeptic will not opine at all, or will have no beliefs, at other points he is ambivalent about the scope of his skepticism. At *PH* I 13, Sextus admits that the skeptic does have beliefs in the sense of assenting to his own *pathê*, which are forced upon him by the appearances, and the example he gives is that the skeptic wouldn't say that he isn't feeling cold when he feels cold—exactly the same sort of thing that the Cyrenaic claims, that it is evident that you are warmed, even if you cannot know that the wine causing this affection is by nature warm (*Adv. Col.* 1120e). And at *PH* I 200–201, Sextus says that the skeptic, when he claims that everything is inapprehensible or that he doesn't apprehend anything, really means by this that he doesn't apprehend any of the non-evident things under investigation. This leaves open the possibility that the skeptic *does* apprehend what's evident, i.e., his appearances.

It is for these sorts of reasons that Chisholm characterizes Sextus Empiricus as a forerunner of “purely phenomenalist epistemology” (Chisholm 1941, 376). Chisholm, pointing to *PH* I 13 and *PH* I 15, says that Sextus recognizes the importance of “the given” in epistemology, and does not deny that the given *is* given.<sup>5</sup> Tsouna draws similar parallels between the Cyrenaics and foundationalist epistemologists like Chisholm himself, who are concerned with characterizing correctly what is immediately given in experience, in order to inquire about what (if anything) can be known on the basis of this given (Tsouna 1998, 42–53).

<sup>4</sup> O'Keefe (1997) contains a brief discussion of these different sorts of arguments. Lee (2005) is the best extensive recent treatment.

<sup>5</sup> Perin (2010a and chapter 3 of 2010b) also defends a view along these general lines: the Pyrrhonist does have both beliefs and knowledge of what is evident to him, i.e., of his own *pathê*, such as its appearing to him that honey is sweet.

But if the preceding is correct, how does the Pyrrhonian skeptic differ from the Cyrenaics at all? Why do the Cyrenaics claim that they apprehend the *pathê* alone, while Sextus says that the skeptic apprehends nothing? Here, it seems, the literature gives us a ready answer. It's become almost a commonplace that the ancient philosophers are almost all realists about truth. 'Truth' (for them) must mean 'mind-independent truth', i.e., when ancient philosophers are inquiring about what we can have knowledge of, and what is true, they're almost always talking about knowledge of what is the case about the properties that mind-independent objects have.<sup>6</sup>

The Cyrenaics are the only obvious dissenters from this consensus. On this reading, what is really distinctive about the Cyrenaics is that, unlike all other Greek epistemologists, but like Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, and other modern philosophers, the Cyrenaics think that one's own subjective states of awareness can also be objects of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

But this purported difference between the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists appears fairly trivial—the two positions differ merely verbally, over whether they're willing to grant terms like 'apprehension' or 'knowledge' also in relation to one's own states of awareness, or only in relation to mind-independent states of affairs. Insofar as there is a dispute here (on

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, the stronger claim is often made that for *x* to be "really" F, or F "by nature", (where F stands for some property such as being sweet), it would have to be F invariably and non-relatively. See Hankinson (1995), 129–131 and Bett (2000) for arguments that Aenesidemus uses this sort of claim to argue for skepticism (or, better, for negative epistemic dogmatism), Bett (1997) for the claim that Sextus argues this way *in propria persona* in *Against the Ethicists*, and O'Keefe (1997) for the Epicurean rebuttal of this sort of skeptical argument from relativity.

<sup>7</sup> See Burnyeat (1982) for more on realism and idealism in ancient Greek philosophy, and Tsouna (1998) for much more on Cyrenaic epistemology generally, but especially pp. 9–25 for proper precautions about interpreting the *pathê* for the Cyrenaics in overly mentalistic or Cartesian terms. Everson (1991), 128–135 also gives a clear account which nicely points that the differences between the Cyrenaic and Cartesian characterizations of one's affections. However, Fine (2000), esp. 206–209, contains an extended argument that Sextus also allows subjective states to be objects of truth and knowledge. If Fine is right, and if the Cyrenaics and Sextus do have basically the same position with regard to our acquaintance to the appearances (as she also holds, but which I argue against below), this would reopen the question of why Sextus doesn't admit that the skeptic apprehends his appearances. The simplest answer, I think, would be that Fine succeeds in showing that what Sextus says *allows* for appearances to be objects of truth and knowledge, but it does not *commit* him to the position. Thus, Sextus need not say he apprehends his affections (even if his position is substantially the same as the Cyrenaics), especially when dialectically interacting with dogmatists whose own standards assume that knowledge must be knowledge of mind-independent states of affairs.

this reading of what's going on), most contemporary philosophers would side with the Cyrenaics, granting that one can have knowledge of things like *I am currently feeling cold* or *I seem to be tasting something bitter now*.

### 3. *The Case for the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists Differing Significantly*

Now that I've presented what (I hope) to be a strong case for thinking that the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists have, more or less, the same position when it comes to our epistemic relationship to our own appearances, let me try to knock it down. In order to knock it down, however, I will take a fairly indirect route, first talking about the Cyrenaics on truth and appearances in more detail than I have above.

First, I'd like to note that it's misleading to say that all other Greeks are realists about truth but not the Cyrenaics. After all, they think (as much as other Greek philosophers, with the possible exception of Protagoras) that ordinary statements about the properties of ordinary objects, in order to be true, have to be true in virtue of mind-independent objects and properties. If the statement "The wind is hot" is true, it's true because there exists a mind-independent object, the wind, which has the mind-independent property of heat. If the Cyrenaics were not realists about the semantics of these types of ordinary-object statements, they wouldn't be skeptics (or, better, negative dogmatists) about the possibility of knowing such things. On this question, they're with Descartes and Hume, and against Berkeley and Kant. (Whereas Protagoras, or at least the *Theaetetus* version of Protagoras, is with Berkeley and Kant, and hence is not a skeptic about our ability to know things like whether the wind is hot.)

However, it is true that the Cyrenaics differ from other Greeks in thinking that one can apprehend/know one's own subjective states. But there is more to this—i.e., there are further reasons as to why they think this—than the brief discussion above suggests. This is not merely a terminological dispute, or a relic of the distinction between appearance and reality.

In order to get at these reasons, let me take a slight detour into the topic of the contorted neologisms the Cyrenaics coin in order to describe the *pathê* correctly. For example, at *Adv. Col.* 1120e Plutarch reports that, according to the Cyrenaics, we should say that we are "whitened" or "sweetened," instead of saying "I am tasting something sweet" or even "It seems to me that I am tasting something sweet." It

gets even worse, from the standpoint of linguistic felicity: According to the Cyrenaics, a person with jaundice (to whom things supposedly look yellow) is “moved yellowly” (*AM* VII 192). Why do the Cyrenaics disfigure the language in this way? Their motivation is similar to the reason modern foundationalist epistemologists like Chisholm have for coining locutions like “I am appeared to redly” (see Chisholm 1982, 15–18, and Tsouna 1998, 45–53). Such statements are supposed to report only what is immediately given in one’s experience, and not to go beyond it.

On this point, the Cyrenaics can be contrasted with the Stoics and Epicureans on the perceptual states that are the criteria of knowledge. For the Stoics, the *phantasia katalêptikê* (the graspable, or apprehensible, impression) is the principal criterion of truth. Such an impression, in addition to being infallible, is a representational state—it has propositional content about its cause, and it (accurately) represents the characteristics of the object which is its cause. The Epicureans say that *all* impressions are true (or real—the term *alêthês* can mean either). Exactly how to understand this claim is highly controversial, but all interpreters agree that the Epicureans are interested in affirming that impressions are effects of objects in the environment, that thereby give us information about their causes and can be used as the basis for making inferences about what is not evident.<sup>8</sup> The Epicureans mock the Cyrenaics’ notion that we can have knowledge only of our own states of awareness and not of their causes (*Adv. Col.* 1120d). The Cyrenaics use their contorted neologisms in order to avoid entirely any reference to objects or states of affairs beyond the content of the *pathê* themselves. This is because their project is to give an analysis of our awareness of our own internal states, which gets us down to what is immediately given.

The Cyrenaics wish to get down to what is immediately given because they share the criteria of other Greek epistemologists as to what can be apprehended, and they think that a proper analysis of our *pathê* will show that the *pathê*, and the *pathê* alone, meet these criteria. We can apprehend only the *pathê* because only the *pathê* are intrinsically and

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<sup>8</sup> See Tsouna (1998), 34–38 for a brief overview of the Stoics and Epicureans on impressions and how they differ from the Cyrenaics, chapter 10 of O’Keefe (2009) for an overview of the controversies on the truth of impressions for the Epicureans, and Everson (1990) and Striker (1991) for some influential treatments of the question.

irreversibly clear (*enargê*, which Tsouna translates as 'self-evident', *Adv. Col.* 1120e), and "establish their own content as incontrovertibly true of something" (Tsouna 1998, 37)—as it turns out, true of themselves—so that we can make assertions about them infallibly (*adiapsuestôs*) and irrefutably (*anexelenktôs*, *AM* VII 191). Thus, we can apprehend the nature of our own *pathê*—that's why it's proper to use the language of *katalêpsis*, of intellectual apprehending, when discussing the subject's relationship to his own *pathê*.

To sum up: the Cyrenaics think that our *pathê* can be characterized in ways which strip away any purported representational content referring to objects external to the perceiver—in ways that refer only to what is immediately given. So characterized, their content is both self-evident to the perceiver, and sincere statements which report this content are infallible.

I hope that this description of the Cyrenaics' position, and of their project, should already be enough to raise the suspicion that a Pyrrhonist, whatever he thinks of the appearances, isn't doing what the Cyrenaics are doing. I shall now try to reinforce this suspicion.

Let's return to the different vocabularies which the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists use to describe their appearances. Instead of the contorted neologisms of the Cyrenaics, the standard way that Sextus uses to describe appearances is simply that "*x* seems *F* to me." This is a way, primarily, of describing how *the object* seems to be, not merely the internal states of the percipient, although it can also include internal states, such as my feeling chilly. In reporting how the object appears to be, of course, the skeptic is not committed to the object actually *being* the way it appears to be—but equally, the skeptic is not incorrigibly reporting the contents of purely subjective states. As Hankinson notes,

[A]n appearance in this sense is not a private, internal phenomenon. It is not a distant ancestor of the sense-datum. When Sextus does wish to refer to purely mental phenomena, he employs the language of impression, *phantasia* (see [*PH* 1 19]), and *phantasiai* are caused by the *phainomena*, which are their intentional objects. An appearance, then, is not something we have of objects: it is something that objects themselves have (as I might compliment you upon your appearance). That is, the Sextan Sceptic does not restrict what can be strictly talked about to purely mental items—he is no phenomenalist.<sup>9</sup> (Hankinson 1995, 25)

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Annas and Barnes (1985), 23–24 and Everson (1991). However, *pace* Everson, this way of conceiving of appearances need not presuppose (nor commit the skeptic to

Tsouna makes a similar point: the terminological difference between the Cyrenaics and Pyrrhonists “reflects a deep philosophical difference between them.” The Cyrenaics use the terminology they do because they wish to isolate what is immediately given in experience, whereas the Pyrrhonist has no such agenda (Tsouana 1998, 57).

This difference is underscored by the Pyrrhonian skeptic’s promiscuous willingness to fill in his formula “*x* seems *F* to me” with almost any items. The wind may seem warm to me, but equally, because of the customs of my society, cannibalism may seem impious (*PH* III 207, see also *PH* I 148 ff.), and arguments may seem powerful. As Burnyeat notes, “Time and again Sextus warns that sceptic formulae such as “I determine nothing” and “No more this than that” (*PH* I 15) or the conclusions of sceptic argument like “Everything is relative” (*PH* I 135), or indeed the entire contents of his treatise (*PH* I 4), are to be taken as mere records of appearance” (Burnyeat 1980/97, 39). The Cyrenaics, by contrast, confine the *pathê*, strictly speaking, to what we may want to call “raw feels”—“being reddened,” “being chilled,” “being soured,” and the like. I take it that this restriction is meant to exclude any content that represents states of affairs external to the percipient’s present state, whereas the Pyrrhonist isn’t interested in practicing this particular brand of theoretical hygiene.

This difference fits in well with the overall Pyrrhonian position. The Pyrrhonist is not in the business of putting forward analysis and theory; doing so would be antithetical to him. This aversion to theory applies even to his statements about himself and the skeptical way of life. When describing skepticism as an ability to set out oppositions and produce suspension of judgment, Sextus quickly notes that that he doesn’t mean “ability” in any fancy or technical sense, “but simply in the sense of ‘to be able to’” (*PH* I 9). And when he asserts that skepticism does have an account of how to live correctly, he qualifies that “correctly” here “is not taken only with respect to virtue, but more loosely” (*PH* I 17). After going through how the skeptic uses various phrases such as “things are no more this way than that,” Sextus states: “We say too that we do not use the phrases strictly, making clear the objects to which they are applied, but indifferently and, if you like, in a loose sense—for it is unbecoming

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believing) that these objects (or the external world in general) exist. See Fine (2003). As she points out (2003, 350–351), Macbeth could say that the dagger’s handle seems to be pointed toward his hand, while still doubting that there really is a dagger there: the ‘dagger’ need be only an ‘ostensible object’.

for a skeptic to fight over phrases ...” (*PH* I 207) Insofar as the Cyrenaic has a theory about the immediate content of our perceptual states, and uses this theory in order to show how these states (and only these states) can be objects of *katalêpsis*, he dogmatizes in a way that the Pyrrhonist would not. The Pyrrhonist is happy to report how things seem to him, but in doing so, he has no theory about the contents of his own awareness that he is relying on to justify this practice, because he has no theory or exact account to justify *any* part of his skeptical practice, as opposed to simply describing (in a loose and popular manner) how his practice goes.

So the Cyrenaic, when he says that he apprehends that he is chilled, and the Pyrrhonist, when he says that he seems cold, are actually doing very different things with their utterances. The Cyrenaics are well outside the mainstream of Greek epistemology in restricting what we can know to the immediate contents of one's own affections. Nonetheless the Cyrenaic evinces the same epistemic attitude toward his *pathê* that other dogmatists have toward what they think they know. The Cyrenaic is perfectly willing to judge that he is in this state or that state, and he is committed to its being true that the contents of his own awareness are exactly as he thinks they are. As noted, the Cyrenaics think that sincere statements regarding the *pathê* are infallible and irrefutable. The Pyrrhonist does not think that statements about one's affections are self-evidently true, even if they're 'obvious' in some loose and popular sense. And if statements regarding one's feelings like "I'm feeling chilly now" are undeniable, or, as Sextus puts, not subject to investigation (*PH* I 22), this isn't because their content is *epistemically* self-evident, but because, as a matter of *psychological* fact, the Pyrrhonist is unable to deny them, any more than, as just another human being, he can avoid shivering when feeling cold. (See *PH* I 13 and 29: both the assent to feelings which produces skeptical utterances such as "I am feeling chilled," and the shivering when chilled, are described as involuntary, as being "forced upon" (*anankein*) the skeptic.)<sup>10</sup>

So if the skeptic doesn't claim to know he's chilly, what *is* he expressing when he says "I'm feeling chilly"? The answer is not entirely straightforward, because it's highly controversial whether skeptics (on Sextus'

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<sup>10</sup> This attitude extends also to arguments themselves, which the skeptic regards primarily in terms of their psychological force—their force in both moving the skeptic to action and in curing the dogmatists of their afflictions—as opposed to their epistemic cogency in establishing their conclusions as true. See Machuca (2009) for more on this topic.



account) have beliefs, and if so, what they are about and what they're like. For the sake of this paper, I wish neither to settle nor even to enter into this controversy in any detail, but I cannot avoid it entirely. Scholars mainly divide into two camps: proponents of the 'rustic' interpretation (that the Pyrrhonist strictly speaking has *no* beliefs at all, although he'll have dispositions to act as if certain things are the case) and of the 'urbane' interpretation (that the Pyrrhonist can have some ordinary, garden-variety beliefs about things but eschews philosophical or scientific theorizing about the way things "really" are, or are in their nature).<sup>11</sup> The position of this paper should (I believe) be acceptable to either camp. On the 'rustic' view, the skeptic has no beliefs, but he can be suitably moved around by the appearances and thereby live well. (A hungry skeptic seeing a banana in front of him may be moved to reach out for the banana without assenting to the statement that there is a banana in front of him.) The ways in which the skeptic can be moved around include not only his actions generally, but also his utterances, which express these appearances but do not manifest beliefs about them. (See Barnes 1982/97, 63–67 and Hankinson 1995, 295, who compare such "avowals" regarding one's appearances to the cries of children in pain, which *express* pain but do not *state* that *I am in pain*.) On the 'urbane' view, the skeptic can have beliefs about his appearances just as he can about other things, but in both cases he eschews dogmatic theorizing about their nature. So he can believe that he is feeling chilly, just as he can believe that the tower is round or cannibalism impious—as long as in none of these cases does he think e.g., that he is *really* or "by nature" feeling chilly, or the tower really round, or cannibalism really impious, based upon some argument or theorizing. On either interpretation, 'rustic' or 'urbane', the appearances themselves do not constitute some specially privileged class of items which are exempt from either the eschewal of beliefs *tout court* (rustic) or the eschewal of dogmatic or scientific belief (urbane).

The skeptic, then, can report how things appear to him without thereby presupposing any commitment to a theory about what appearances are or his relationship to them when he does so. We can imagine a conversation between a Pyrrhonian skeptic and a dogmatist going something like the following:

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<sup>11</sup> See Burnyeat and Frede (1997) for a collection of some of the most influential papers on this debate, and Thorsrud (2009), 173–200 for a recent overview and treatment.

DOGMATIST: "What color is the table over there?"

SKEPTIC: "It seems red to me."

DOGMATIST: "Well, do you think that the table is red, or at least that probably it's red?"

SKEPTIC: "I'm not committed one way or the other."

DOGMATIST: "Well, at a minimum you're committed to thinking that you know *how things currently seem to you*, right? You *must* concede this in to be able to state intelligibly that the table *seems* red to you. Don't you see that?"

SKEPTIC: "Well, the table does seem red to me—I don't deny that, since it's quite obvious—but I don't have any opinion about those sorts of further questions you're asking me. But if you'd like to work out a theory regarding how one should answer them, I'll be happy to chat with you about it."

The dogmatist will complain that the skeptic is not entitled to make such statements about how things seem to him unless he has some sort of commitment, at least implicitly, as to what sorts of characteristics his experiences have and how he has access to them. But this parallels the dogmatist's complaint that the skeptic is not entitled to act unless, at least implicitly, he has some sort of commitment to the way things are and what things are to be sought and avoided. In the case of the *apraxia* argument, whether or not the dogmatist's complaint is justified—and I will not address that question here—Sextus does not concede the dogmatist's point. Consistent with his overall practice, I think that Sextus could, and should, make a similar maneuver when it comes to his attitude toward his own appearances. He can be moved by them, and he is willing to avow how things seem to him, without thinking that this practice requires any further theoretical underpinnings.

If Sextus were to think that, as a skeptic, he can unproblematically assume that there is a given in experience, whose content we know incorrigibly and judge of infallibly, he would simply be mistaken. Wherever one comes down on the philosophical issues at stake, the recent literature on the "Myth of the Given" certainly shows that the accounts of experience assumed (or argued for) by, e.g., the Cyrenaics, Descartes, Ayer, and Chisholm are not free of heavy (and perhaps dubious) theoretical commitments about our experiences: for instance, that our experiences are "transparent" to us (we can know exactly what it is that we are experiencing), and that we can get beneath all of the judgments *about* our experiences and based upon our experiences (such as "The wall is white") to something non-judgmental and immediately given (such as

“White patch here now”).<sup>12</sup> At the very least, it’s controversial to say that one can know with certainty exactly the content of one’s own affections. So Sextus, as a Pyrrhonist, should *not* blithely assume that one cannot be mistaken about the content of one’s experiences, that they are immediately “given” in this sense.

In any case, I see no reason to think that Sextus *does* assume the sorts of things that the Cyrenaics do. Although questions about the nature of our acquaintance with our own experiences have become particularly controverted in 20th-century epistemology, they were also disputed over by the ancient Greeks.<sup>13</sup> Sextus would be quite happy to hear about the modern disputes about the “Myth of the Given” as undermining the theoretical pretensions of all dogmatic philosophers, including the pretensions of the Cyrenaics about the incorrigibility and infallibility of beliefs about one’s *pathê*.

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<sup>12</sup> See Sellars (1956), and Alston (1971, 1983), for a few prominent attacks upon and defenses of the “given”.

<sup>13</sup> For example, in Socrates’ attacks on the Protagorean and Heraclitean positions in *Theaetetus* 179c–186e, Aristotle’s discussions of the “common sensibles” (qualities such as shape which are not proper to any one of the senses), and Aristocles’ attack on the intelligibility of the Cyrenaic position that only the *pathê* can be apprehended (quoted in Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* XIV.18.31–19.7, trans. in Tsouna 1998, 152–154).

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WHAT GOD DIDN'T KNOW  
(SEXTUS EMPIRICUS AM IX 162–166)\*

James Warren

Could someone understand the word 'pain', who had *never* felt pain?—Is experience to teach me whether this is so or not?—And if we say 'A man could not imagine pain without having sometime felt it'—how do we know? How can it be decided whether it is true?

L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 315

It is sometimes wondered whether ancient philosophers ever entertained the idea that a person's access to his or her own mental states is radically different from the same agent's access to the external world. One way to try to answer this question is to consider their accounts of pain since pain is often offered as a good example of a mental state which is accessed only in this special and private way. Here I consider a passage of Sextus Empiricus that might be thought to come close to this notion but show that even here there is no sign of a radical division between a private and personal internal mental world and the world external to the agent.

I

At *Adversus Mathematicos* (AM) IX 162–166, Sextus offers an argument against the existence of god which depends on a notion of what it is to 'know what pain is like by nature'. The argument is based on the idea that if god exists then god must possess wisdom and therefore know which things are good, which are bad, and which are indifferent. He must therefore know pleasure and pain since these must both be classifiable in some way into those categories. Sextus insists that such a knowledge

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of pleasure and pain requires that god must have experienced pleasure and pain since such experience is the only way in which knowledge of these may be acquired. But if god must experience pain in order to have the wisdom essential to god's being the kind of being he is, and to experience pain is to be receptive of change and decay, then there is a central incoherence to the notion of god under scrutiny: god cannot be both unchanging and perfect and also wise. The argument in full is as follows:

πρὸς τούτοις· εἴπερ πάσας ἔχει τὰς ἀρετὰς ὁ θεός, καὶ φρόνησιν ἔχει. εἰ φρόνησιν ἔχει, (ἔχει) καὶ ἐπιστήμην ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ κακῶν καὶ ἀδιαφόρων. εἰ δὲ ἐπιστήμην ἔχει τούτων, οἶδε ποῖά ἐστι τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακὰ καὶ ἀδιάφορα. (163) ἐπεὶ οὖν καὶ ὁ πόνος τῶν ἀδιαφόρων ἐστίν, οἶδε καὶ τὸν πόνον καὶ ποῖός τις ὑπάρχει τὴν φύσιν. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, καὶ περιπέπτωκεν αὐτῷ· μὴ περιπεσὼν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἔσχε νόησιν αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὃν τρόπον ὁ μὴ περιπεπτωκὼς λευκῷ χρώματι καὶ μέλανι διὰ τὸ ἐκ γενετῆς εἶναι πηρὸς οὐ δύναται νόησιν ἔχειν χρώματος, οὕτως οὐδὲ θεὸς μὴ (164) περιπεπτωκὼς πόνῳ δύναται νόησιν ἔχειν τούτου. ὁπότε γὰρ ἡμεῖς οἱ περιπεσόντες πολλάκις τούτῳ τὴν ιδιότητα τῆς περὶ τοὺς ποδαλγικοὺς ἀλγυδόνος οὐ δυνάμεθα τρανῶς γνωρίζειν, οὐδὲ διηγουμένων ἡμῖν τινων συμβαλεῖν, οὐδὲ παρ' αὐτῶν τῶν πεπονθότων συμφώνως ἀκοῦσαι διὰ τὸ ἄλλους ἄλλως ταύτην ἐρμηνεύειν καὶ τοὺς μὲν στροφῇ, τοὺς δὲ κλάσει, τοὺς δὲ νύξει λέγειν ὅμοιον αὐτοῖς παρακολουθεῖν, ἢ πού γε θεὸς μὴδ' ὅλως πόνῳ περιπεπτωκὼς (165) (οὐ) δύναται πόνου νόησιν ἔχειν. νῆ Δί', ἀλλὰ πόνῳ μὲν, φασίν, οὐ περιπέπτωκεν, ἡδονῇ δέ, καὶ ταύτης ἐκεῖνον νενόηκεν. ὅπερ ἦν εὐήθης. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀμήχανον μὴ πειραθέντα πόνου νόησιν ἡδονῆς λαβεῖν· κατὰ γὰρ τὴν παντός τοῦ ἀλγύνοντος ὑπεξαίρεσιν συνίστασθαι (166) πέφυκεν. εἶτα καὶ τούτου συγχωρηθέντος πάλιν ἀκολουθεῖ τὸ φθαρτὸν εἶναι τὸν θεόν. εἰ γὰρ τῆς τοιαύτης διαχύσεως δεκτικὸς ἐστὶ, καὶ τῆς ἐπὶ τὸ χεῖρον μεταβολῆς ἔσται δεκτικὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ φθαρτός ἐστιν. οὐχὶ δέ γε τοῦτο, ὥστε οὐδὲ τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς.

This is my translation, based on Bury's version but with some modifications:

In addition, if god has all the virtues, he also has practical wisdom. If he has practical wisdom, then he also has knowledge of goods and bads and indifferents. If he possesses knowledge of these, he knows what the goods, bads, and indifferents are like.<sup>1</sup> Since, then, suffering is one of the

<sup>1</sup> The argument would appear to demand this construal rather than the alternative: "he knows what sort of things are good, bad, and indifferent," since Sextus goes on to claim that there is some requirement for god not merely to be able to *categorize* different things but also to know something about their character.

indifferent things, he knows both suffering and what it is like by nature. And if so, he has experienced it; for without experience he would not have formed a notion of it, but, just as the man who has not experienced the colours white and black, owing to his having been blind from birth, cannot possess a notion of colour, so too god cannot have a notion of suffering if he has not experienced it. For given that we, who have often experienced pain, are unable to grasp distinctly the special quality of the pain suffered by gouty patients—neither when we meet people who tell us about it, nor when we listen to people who have suffered from it, since they explain it in conflicting ways, and some say that they find it to resemble twisting, others bending, others stabbing—surely, if god has had no experience at all of suffering, he cannot possess a notion of suffering. Truly, they reply, he has not experienced suffering, but pleasure, and from this he has formed a notion of the other. But this is silly. For, in the first place, it is impossible to acquire a notion of pleasure without having experienced suffering; for it is owing to the withdrawal of everything that gives pain that pleasure really subsists. And, in the next place, if this be granted, it follows once more that god is perishable. For if he is receptive of such a collapse, god will be receptive of change for the worse, and is perishable. But this is not *(true)*, nor, in consequence, is the original supposition *(true)*.

Sextus' opponent in this section is not determined with much clarity but clearly Sextus envisages that his argument will cause difficulties for a Stoic.<sup>2</sup> He has, after all, just spent a considerable time outlining the Stoic arguments in favor of the existence of god. Although it is not clear precisely where in book IX the Stoic material begins, much of the discussion from at least IX 88 is clearly in a Stoic vein and Sextus noted at IX 137 a transition from the exposition of positive arguments by concluding the material "gathered by the Stoics and the other schools" before moving on to his criticisms. Even within this smaller stretch of text concerned particularly with the knowledge of pain there are clear signs that Sextus has in his sights a Stoic target, whether or not he think that other schools ought also to be troubled by his concerns. Most notably, he begins with the premise that god, being wise, must know about what is good, what is bad, and what is indifferent and, furthermore, adds the

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<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of Sextus' opponents, see Long (2006). He takes Sextus' arguments to be targeted primarily at Stoic theological assumption but notes that they are nevertheless "quite general in their scope and will take in any philosophers or persons who hold, as the Stoics did, that gods are animate beings, and so on" (2006, 117). Long also notes (121–127) that the assumption of imperishability on which many of Sextus' arguments depend is not necessarily a Stoic premise.

premise that suffering belongs in the class of indifferents (ἐπεὶ οὖν καὶ ὁ πόνος τῶν ἀδιαφόρων ἐστίν, *AM* IX 163). It is hard to think that this could be anything but a Stoic premise.<sup>3</sup>

That the opponent is Stoic might be confirmed by comparing the parallel section of Cicero's *De natura deorum*. This also supports the view that the argument is originally Academic, and possibly Carneadean. At III 38 the Academic spokesman Cotta turns to arguments against god's possession of various virtues, including practical wisdom: *prudentia*, Cicero's Latin equivalent for φρόνησις.<sup>4</sup>

qualem autem deum intellegere nos possumus nulla virtute praeditum? quid enim? prudentiamne deo tribuamus, quae constat ex scientia rerum bonarum et malarum et nec bonarum nec malarum? cui mali nihil est nec esse potest, quid huic opus est dilectu bonorum et malorum, quid autem ratione, quid intellegentia; quibus utimur ad eam rem, ut apertis obscura adsequamur; at obscurum deo nihil potest esse.

But what kind of god can we imagine who possesses not one virtue? What then? Are we to attribute to god practical wisdom (*prudentia*), which consists in the knowledge of things that are good, things that are bad, and things that are neither good nor bad? But what need of the choice of goods and bads has someone to whom nothing is nor could be bad? What need has he of reasoning, or intelligence—things we use in order to pursue the non-evident via the evident? But nothing can be non-evident to god.

There are clear parallels between Cicero's argument and Sextus'. But there are also important differences.<sup>5</sup> Most important is the fact that Cicero's argument turns on the fact that since nothing can harm god he has no *need* of practical wisdom: there is nothing he has reason to avoid and therefore no need of the virtue which would identify what is good and bad and provide the means for making decisions concerning choice and avoidance. Sextus' version has a more ambitious conclusion in mind. It is Sextus' contention that it is not merely somehow superfluous to attribute these virtues to god; rather, it is impossible for god to have practical wisdom because god cannot meet at least one of the necessary pre-requisites for this virtue, namely the relevant kind of knowledge of goods, bads, and indifferents. Cicero, to be sure, begins with the same

<sup>3</sup> Sextus has already specified at *AM* IX 163 that pain is indifferent, a Stoic thesis, but he needs only the weaker disjunctive claim that "pain is good or bad or indifferent."

<sup>4</sup> Cicero makes this equivalence explicit at *Off.* I 153.

<sup>5</sup> Pease (1958) has a very useful note *ad loc.* but he is not right to say that Cicero has simply "condensed" a longer version preserved by Sextus.



characterisation of the general subject matter of practical wisdom but his concern is not that god somehow fails epistemically such that the virtue is unobtainable for a divinity. Instead, Cicero's argument seems to claim that god is sufficiently impervious to harms that he has no use for this virtue, just as it goes on to claim that god's epistemic grip on things most generally is so penetrating that there is nothing *obscurum* to him such that would warrant his need of the virtues of reasoning to which we poor mortals might aspire. The conclusion of Cicero's argument, in other words, is compatible with the thesis that god still possesses all the *virtutes* (that is, unless we further stipulate that someone can possess only the virtues that he *needs*), while Sextus' argument is stronger in so far as it rules out god's possession of these virtues.<sup>6</sup>

Although the principal target of Sextus' argument is likely to be Stoic, the claim that god is without pain or toil is not uncommon in Greek philosophical thought and can be traced back at least as far as Xenophanes (DK 21 B25). Sextus may feel that it has now become sufficiently central to a conception of divinity that, if he can demonstrate that it is incompatible with another common characteristic of divinity, namely that god is wise, then this inconsistency is extremely damaging for any dogmatic theist. (This argument therefore shares its general form with a number of arguments in this section of *AM IX*.)<sup>7</sup> He may have been encouraged to choose to put the argument in terms of god's knowledge of pain, therefore, at least in part because it is relatively uncontroversial to assume that if there is a god then god's life is pain-free. Contrast this with the question whether god will experience pleasure. This is a much more controversial and would provoke a great deal of disagreement even among dogmatic theists. One of the counter-arguments to Sextus' original claims does in fact rely on the idea that perhaps god experiences pleasure but not pain. Sextus rejects this as incoherent (see IV below). It is still telling, however, that in his initial argument, Sextus instead concentrates on the much safer ground that god cannot be wise without experiencing pain and therefore being perishable.

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<sup>6</sup> We might also compare Aristotle's comments at *NE* 1178b8–18 that certain activities, even those which would could be undertaken virtuously by a human, are “unworthy” of a god.

<sup>7</sup> Sextus names Carneades as a source at *AM IX* 140. For an analysis of the different arguments in this section, see Long (2006), 116 n. 5 and compare Long (2006), 120 on the form of the argument at *AM IX* 146–147.

## II

My primary interest in this argument is in Sextus' defence of the contention that the only way in which it is possible to acquire knowledge of what pain is like by nature is through experiencing it. In that case, Cicero's argument is of no significant further use to the inquiry in hand since it does not share this feature. Further, Sextus defends this important thesis about the only means of acquiring knowledge of pain through replies to two imagined counter-proposals, both of which suggest a way in which knowledge of pain may be acquired indirectly. Neither of these counter-proposals is to be found in Cicero, which suggests either that Sextus has presented a longer account of an original Stoic-Academic debate found only in summary in Cicero or else that Sextus himself or some intermediate source not used by Cicero has expanded the dialectic in this way.<sup>8</sup>

For Sextus to claim that the experience of pain is a necessary condition for someone to know, in some sense, 'what pain is like by nature' is interesting because it might be thought to anticipate in an important way a claim often made in some modern philosophical discussions of pleasure and pain, namely that they are essentially first-personal, private, and subjective experiences. Certainly, if that is indeed a correct account of the nature of pain, it would seem to offer a reasonably clear explanation of why what pain is like cannot properly be known about indirectly: it is just the kind of thing which is essentially first-personal and private and that is why knowledge of pain is not communicable from one person to another. Some modern philosophers also make the additional claim that experience of pleasure and pain of this kind is not just first-personal in this interesting sense, but it is also incorrigible: a person cannot be mistaken in his assessment of whether he is experiencing pleasure and pain.<sup>9</sup> Sextus, we should note at the outset, makes explicit no such additional claim and in any case need not do so for the purposes of this destructive argument.<sup>10</sup> He needs only the claim that in order to acquire

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<sup>8</sup> An originally Academic anti-Stoic source is also suggested by Sextus' claim that we are unable to "grasp distinctly" (τὸ ἀνῶς γνωρίζειν) the peculiar characteristic of the pain of gout. This adverbial characterization of knowledge that is clear and distinct is also prominent in his general criticisms of the Stoics' theory of *katalēpsis* (see e.g. *AM* VII 172, 404).

<sup>9</sup> For a helpful discussion of some modern philosophical treatments of pain see Aydede (2006b).

<sup>10</sup> Here we might contrast the Cyrenaics who do assert that the *πάθη*, including pain,

knowledge of pain it is necessary to experience pain. (The argument leaves aside the question whether experiencing pain is *sufficient* for knowledge of pain. If we wish to insist that knowledge of pain involves, roughly speaking, some kind of conceptual awareness that what one is experiencing is a pain then an infant, for example, may experience pain but not be aware that what she is experiencing is a pain.)<sup>11</sup>

Before pressing on, we should register two important caveats. Given the nature of this argument, it is not possible to read from the text here anything very secure about Sextus' own attitudes to a given philosophical issue. That is not solely because, officially at least, Sextus himself would not profess to have any beliefs about such matters. (Indeed, Sextus may feel that his outlook on the matter—such that it is—is made perfectly clear when at *PH* I 23–24 he lists the “necessity of the *πάθη*” as one of the criteria by which the skeptic lives *ἀδοξάστως*.) Rather, the problem in this case is compounded by the fact that this argument is clearly dialectical. We have to content ourselves, in that case, to paying attention to which elements Sextus does or does not himself choose to question or reject and then notice what he thinks he can rely on in such a dialectical exchange. These elements, whether accepted by Sextus or not, might at least give some indication of the generally assumed starting points in such a discussion. If this argument does strike home against anyone and if it relies on some notion of the knowledge of pain being related to pain's essentially subjective nature, then we can offer the argument as a whole as evidence for some such conception being reasonable at Sextus' time, whether or not Sextus himself shared it.

There are other clues in this passage which might help us to form a better picture of Sextus' working conception of pain. Above all, Sextus' reference here to “the peculiarity of pain from gout” (*τὴν ιδιότητα τῆς περὶ τοὺς ποδαλγικοὺς ἀλγηδόνης*) is worthy of note. It is important for Sextus to establish that all the various reports from sufferers are indeed reports about one and the same subject in order to maintain that they are in fact in mutual conflict. It seems overwhelmingly likely that this

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are known incorrigibly; indeed, for the Cyrenaics the *πάθη* are the only things which are—borrowing the Stoic terminology—‘kataleptic’. Whether Sextus holds that he has incorrigible access to his *πάθη* is not clear; much depends on the interpretation of, for example, the controversial passage at *PH* I 13. According to Galen (*De diff. puls.* 8.711K), the “rustic Pyrrhonians” did not think they had secure knowledge even of their own *πάθη*.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Dretske (2006).

is meant to pick out the peculiar feel of the pain caused by gout, in the manner of contrasting this with presumably other peculiar feels of, for example, the pain caused by arthritis.<sup>12</sup> It is what makes this pain the pain of gout rather than any other particular kind of pain and rather than pain in general. In other words, Sextus seems to be appealing to the plausible idea of there being a peculiar feel to various different pains caused by various different physical ailments and forms of damage. He is not, it seems, appealing to there being a peculiar feel of pain most generally in contrast with, for example, the peculiar feel of pleasure most generally. Strictly speaking, for his argument to proceed he needs only to secure the thesis that in order to have any knowledge of pain at all god must have experienced *some* form of pain, since that will suffice to show that god must therefore be subject to change and decay. However, a stronger claim, namely that in order to know pain god must, in effect, have knowledge of the peculiarities of all the various possible distinct kinds of pain, will also suit his purpose. From a rhetorical point of view, it will suggest that in order to have 'knowledge of pain' god needs not only to have experienced some pain or other, no matter which, but will also need to have experienced gout, and arthritis, and all the various other forms of pain which each has its own peculiarity. This would be a pleasingly awkward conclusion for the theist opponent: god would as a result seem to turn out to be a very ailing and frail sort of being.

The question naturally arises whether the assumption of there being some kind of relevant peculiarity of the pain of gout such that it must be experienced to be known, is a Stoic tenet—since the argument appears to be aimed principally at a Stoic opponent—or alternatively might be traced back to any other known philosophical school. We might note at the outset that it is not absolutely clear whether Sextus assumes that (i) all pains are alike in some sense but different kinds of pains vary in various ways which are not essential to them being pains or (ii) different kinds of pains vary in ways that do not include a common qualitative nature for all pains. It would seem likely that he does argue on the assumption of the first alternative because of the nature of the *a fortiori* kind of argument he is proposing. The most reasonable assumption is that he is arguing as follows: even those of us who have experienced pain of some kind (and

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<sup>12</sup> Compare the use of the *ιδιότης/κοινότης* distinction at *AM* VIII 41–42.

perhaps, unfortunately, of many kinds) cannot come to know indirectly the particular nuances of the pain of a kind we have not yet experienced, for example: gout. It is therefore much less likely that a being such as god who, *ex hypothesi*, has experienced no kind of pain at all, might come to know pain. The argument would therefore appear to rest on the notion that various pains—of gout, of toothache, and the like—are similar *qua* pains but nevertheless sufficiently different that only direct personal experience can provide knowledge of their differing respective qualities. On this view, pain is a genus of which these various pains are species.<sup>13</sup> If that is right, then it seems to follow that we might know pain in general by knowing at least two of its species (provided, perhaps, one can recognise sufficiently their common character *qua* pains) but that this will not be sufficient to know any other species of pain in all its particularity.

We can also raise a question about what precisely is involved in possessing 'knowledge of pain' and about what Sextus' conception of this might be, since it is not difficult to see that there are various possible different ways to image what 'knowledge of pain' might amount to. Sextus is helpfully clear in his assertion that the kind of knowledge in question here is somehow qualitative: it is knowledge of "what pain *is like by nature*" (καὶ ποῖός τις ὑπάρχει τὴν φύσιν). The knowledge involved is apparently distinct from, for example, a knowledge of what the word 'pain' means; the question is not one of god's linguistic competence.<sup>14</sup> Nor is the knowledge involved the sort needed to be able to distinguish someone in pain from someone not in pain. Rather, what is at issue seems to be god's possession of some kind of understanding of the qualitative nature of pain *per se*. But even this is relatively under-determined as an account of precisely what, on this hypothesis, god cannot know, since it leaves plenty of room for different accounts of what this knowledge of

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<sup>13</sup> Is there in fact some general shared qualitative characteristic of all pains? Although many people will say that there is not a general way all *pleasures* feel—pleasures are more radically heterogeneous—there is no general consensus about what we should say about pains on this score. Certainly pains vary in various phenomenological ways. But do they all share at least some characteristics? For an argument that they do not, see Gustafson (2006). Goldstein (2000), on the other hand, does think that pain has a distinctive quale but that this is a second-order property that supervenes on a widely varied set of first-order properties of having a particular qualitative character. So burning and aching have different qualitative characters but in both there supervenes the character of being an intrinsically bad sensation, i.e. a pain.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Goldstein (2000), 101.

the qualitative nature of pain might amount to. Sextus' insistence that it is essential to experience pain in order to acquire this knowledge would be most plausible, we may think, if by 'knowledge of pain' he means us to understand something along the lines of 'knowledge of what it is like to be in pain' or, perhaps, 'knowledge of how pain feels' (what we might call *experiential knowledge*). Certainly, as we shall see, his supporting argument about the experience of gout would seem to make this way of understanding the notion of 'knowledge of pain' the most plausible. But there remain, of course, various ways to understand 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature'. For example, it might be possible to possess in some sense 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature' if one has a knowledge of the various biological or neurological processes involved when a person places his hand on an extremely hot piece of metal. This sort of knowledge would seem to be available to people who have not themselves, fortunately, ever experienced what it is like to put one's hand on an extremely hot piece of metal. Similarly, someone who has never experienced gout might know all about the pathology of gout and also about the neurology of nociception. Even before any first-hand experience of pain, such a neurologist might be said to have 'knowledge of what the pain of gout is like by nature' in some relevant sense. But all the same, once the neurologist experiences first hand some particular kind of sensation, perhaps by becoming gouty, there might still be a case for saying that the neurologist learns something new.

Sextus' first comment might encourage the thought that he is stipulating that direct personal experience is a necessary condition of possessing knowledge of this sort of experience, and therefore that he means to refer to 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature' in this second and stronger sense. His example of the congenitally blind stipulates that they *cannot* have knowledge of black and white since they have never experienced seeing black or white. On the face of it, this does seem to be a strong claim that personal experience is necessary for the relevant kind of knowledge, particularly since it does not merely claim that such congenitally blind people do not have such knowledge but rather surely implies that the reason why such knowledge is impossible for them to acquire is precisely due to their lacking the relevant and necessary ability, namely the power of sight. In other words, the only way to acquire knowledge of black and white in this sense is to be able to see black and white for oneself and, moreover, to have seen black and white for oneself. A blind person may, in other words, be able to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the phys-

iology and anatomy of sight. Even so, it appears that simply being blind from birth is sufficient to rule out the possibility of having knowledge of the kind that Sextus is interested in here.

Similarly, the analogous claim in the case of god would be that the only way to acquire knowledge of pain is to be able to experience pain for oneself and, moreover, to have experienced pain for oneself. On this view, 'knowledge of what pain is like by nature' in Sextus' argument does seem to amount to knowledge of what it is like to experience pain and, furthermore, to be the sort of knowledge that can be acquired only through first-hand experience of pain. God stands to the relevant knowledge of pain like the congenitally blind man does to the analogous knowledge of color. Thus, he is to be contrasted with a different class of people imagined later in the text: those who have experienced pain but not the specific pain of gout. Although it is not possible for those who have experienced pain other than the pain of gout to come to know the pain of gout indirectly, such people still have a conception of pain in general terms. The blind man, however, does not merely lack a knowledge of black or white; Sextus is quite explicit that he has no knowledge of *color* (οὐ δύναται νόησιν ἔχειν χρώματος). The point is, presumably, that it is not simply the case that although he has the correct apparatus to acquire this knowledge he has not had the correct and direct personal experience necessary. He is unlike a person who has seen only orange, red, and blue and therefore has no knowledge of black and white. Rather, the congenitally blind man is entirely unable to acquire any such knowledge of color at all. God is like him, we are supposed to think, when it comes to knowledge of pain.

Sextus is not alone in insisting that if god is to be said to have the sort of understanding appropriate for a divinity, he ought not to be incapable of an important kind of understanding that we mortals all appear to be able to acquire. Concerns similar to that raised by Sextus are still offered by philosophers of religion. We might, for example, compare Sextus' argument with a concern raised by Richard Francks, which Francks relates to a demand to ascribe to god omniscience "in a strong sense":

My knee hurts, and I am aware of the fact. If a perfect physiologist examined my knee he would know it too. But there is a difference between my awareness and his. What kind of difference? I do not know anything which he does not know. On the contrary, he knows much more about my pain than I do—'I only know it hurts'. I do not even want to say that I know it better than he does. And, provided he is giving me his full attention, I do not want to say either that I am better aware of my pain

than he is. But there is still a difference between me and him: we know what we know in completely different ways. We might say: we know the same thing from different points of view. The question then is: is it enough for God to be the perfect physiologist, or must he somehow 'feel my pain'? I think he must, because if not, then there is something which I know and he does not, viz. not my pain, but my view of my pain. Of course, God 'knows just how I feel', but that phrase is no more comfort here than elsewhere: his knowledge remains theoretical, derived, whereas mine is perceptual, immediate. Mine is not therefore better, but it is different. If God's knowledge of my pain is only that of the perfect physiologist, then I have an awareness, a perspective, which God lacks. And that contradicts the spirit of the first requirement.<sup>15</sup> (1979, 396)

There are obvious ways in which the line of concern outlined by Francks might be supplemented by a more developed account of this "perspective" which god would appear to lack, perhaps by a full account of the what-it-is-like-ness of first-personal experience of things such as pain. But regardless of this further elaboration, Francks' worry shows that there remains a plausible case for thinking that divine wisdom might require a first-hand experience of pain because that first-hand experience is thought to be a necessary condition of an appropriate understanding of suffering.

At this point, it might be tempting to think that Sextus' argument must also share its central intuitions with some celebrated modern arguments in favor of there being a 'what-it-is-like', for example, to feel pain or see red or be a bat—sometimes referred to as *qualia*—which is then used as evidence for there being an irreducible first-personal element to consciousness. For example, consider the case of Mary, the scientist described in Frank Jackson's famous thought-experiment.<sup>16</sup> She knows and understands the various scientific (physicalist) accounts of color perception, understands the physics of light, and so on. But she has

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<sup>15</sup> I can see no evidence that Franck is aware of the parallel argument in Sextus. Franck's reaction to the argument is that god's omniscience can be preserved by god's immanent omnipresence: god does have my perspective on my pain because he is 'in me' and therefore can know it as I can, 'from the inside' as it were. For some other discussions of problems raised by the tension between divine omniscience and experiential knowledge, particularly of pain, see Sarot (1992), 70–77.

<sup>16</sup> See Jackson (1982, 1986). I refer to the case of Mary only for a convenient analogy and for the sake of attempting to clarify what I take to be Sextus' position. I make no attempt to defend the idea that there is something which Mary did not know nor, if indeed there is something she did not know, do I intend to pin-point what precisely she did not know.



never herself seen anything red. Mary does not, like a blind person, lack the correct apparatus for acquiring the relevant knowledge; she merely happens to live in an environment in which the necessary conditions for acquiring such knowledge have never been met. She can see, and certainly can see black and white; but she has never seen something red. She is more like, for example, Sextus' imagined people who have experienced pain but have never experienced the pain of gout.

Although there are important points of similarity between what Mary did not know and what, on Sextus' argument, god did not know or the gout-free sufferers did not know, we ought to be cautious about attributing the same kind of explanation offered for Mary's ignorance to Sextus when we wonder what his explanation is for why people cannot know the pain of gout without experiencing it. The grounds for this caution are to be found in some of Sextus' supporting arguments. Sextus finds time to address two counter-objections, both of which try to show that god might acquire knowledge of pain without having to experience it. The first of these counter-arguments is the most important, since this is the occasion on which he responds to a claim that knowledge of pain might be acquired by interviewing, as it were, people about this kind of pain (οὐδὲ διηγουμένων ἡμῖν τινων συμβαλεῖν ...). Immediately after the example of the congenitally blind, Sextus returns to the central case of knowledge of pain, seems to countenance an alternative and indirect method of acquiring this knowledge and expresses various concerns about the indirect acquisition of knowledge of pain, that is of acquiring knowledge of pain in any way which does not involve experiencing pain first-hand. These concerns are meant to cut-off this possible reply to Sextus' original denial that god can come to know pain without experiencing it.

### III

Sextus' response to the first counter-proposal takes the form of an *a fortiori* argument. Sextus wants us to think about how difficult it is even for us, who have at least experienced some pain, to come to know the pain of gout. (He assumes, therefore, that his audience are not themselves gouty.) The text at this point appears to offer a pair of alternative possibilities for the source of such indirect knowledge which are both rejected: (i) "people who tell us about it" (διηγουμένων ἡμῖν τινων) and (ii) "people who have suffered from it" (αὐτῶν τῶν πεπονθότων). It is

clear who the second group are: these are people who have themselves suffered from this ailment and who are rejected as a reliable source, as we shall see, on the interesting grounds that they give conflicting reports of the condition. The identity of the first group is less clear and it is not explicitly stated why they are not a useful source of information. One possibility is that this is a very general group. They are people who might tell you something about the pain of gout, perhaps including doctors or relatives or friends of people who have suffered from gout. Perhaps we are to assume that their reports are divergent too. It is not hard to see, in any case, how Sextus might reject them as an authority: either they speak on the basis of personal knowledge, in which case they ought properly to be classed among the second group, or else they are simply relating another second-hand account. If the latter, then they are no more reliable than their source, which again will be either repeating second-hand information or be an actual sufferer. One way or another, therefore, this first group can be rejected or made to collapse into the second group, whose reliability is then doubted. The overall picture is clear nevertheless. You might think that it is possible to know what it is like to feel the pain of gout by talking to people who are experiencing or have experienced that pain and discovering what it is like. But, Sextus argues, it is not possible for us to acquire such knowledge of the pain of gout in that way and, remember, unlike the hypothesised pain-free but knowing god, we at least have experienced some pain in our lives. If it is impossible for us gout-free but otherwise experienced sufferers to know the particular pain of gout, then *a fortiori* it is impossible for god, who has no experience of pain at all, to do so.

What is important and interesting is that these concerns about the indirect method seem not to be generated because he thinks that pain is such that it can be known only through direct first-personal experience. Sextus himself, of course, will profess no settled opinion of his own about the necessary and sufficient conditions for acquiring such knowledge. But it is striking nevertheless that he chooses not to undermine this counter-argument on the grounds that it implausibly accepts the very idea that such knowledge could be acquired indirectly. Instead, he says that it is impossible to acquire such knowledge indirectly because of the conflicting set of reports that any inquirer would receive from those who have directly experienced the pain of gout. The implication must surely be that were a consistent and reliable set of reports available, then such a form of inquiry might indeed be a reasonable method of acquiring this form of knowledge indirectly.

The following comparison might help to explain the important differences between Sextus' argument and the concerns raised about *qualia* by something like Mary's situation. Sextus' proposal that we might come to know the pain of gout by interviewing gout sufferers would seem to be akin to the idea that Mary might in some sense acquire 'knowledge of seeing red' by asking people what it is like to see red. Sextus seems to allow that it might be possible for Mary to come to have the required kind of knowledge provided only that she can collect a consistent and reliable set of reports. Without herself seeing anything red, therefore, she might nevertheless come to acquire knowledge of that kind of experience. Even then, Mary may not know 'all there is to know' about seeing red, just as in the analogous epistemic state our imagined god may still not know 'all there is to know' about pain. Perhaps Mary will find out something more on the first occasion she sees a red rose.<sup>17</sup> And perhaps Sextus' imagined goutless mortal will find out more about what the pain of gout is if he ever becomes gouty. Nevertheless Sextus implies that he might know what the pain of gout is like in some sense once he has a consistent and reliable set of reports from those who have suffered it. Similarly, perhaps god will find out more if ever—heavens forbid—he does experience pain first-hand; nevertheless he might know what pain is like if he can only acquire a set of consistent and reliable reports from those who have experienced pain. In other words, even without the additional awareness that might come from direct personal experience, god might know enough to be able to claim to have "knowledge of goods, bads, and indifferents" in a manner sufficient for him to be wise, if only he could get a consistent and reliable set of reports from others.

The problem Sextus outlines is not, therefore, based on the assumption that pain cannot be known except by direct, first-personal, acquaintance. Rather, he says that it would be impossible to acquire knowledge of pain through these indirect means because even those people suffering from the same ailment—gout, for example—will describe their experience in wildly differing ways. Some say it is like a kind of twisting; some say it is like a kind of bending; others say it is like a kind of stabbing. (A

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<sup>17</sup> Some of Jackson's comments (e.g. 1986, 294, where he says that Mary may, after her release and after experiencing seeing red, come to recognize why her friends thought her previously so deprived) suggest that Mary might even before seeing red have heard some account from others about the experience. Even so, Jackson insists that Mary acquires some new knowledge on herself seeing red for the first time.

brief look at ancient medical discussions of gout shows that they also tend to emphasise the fact that it manifests itself in different and sometimes conflicting symptoms.)<sup>18</sup> In fact, this is a powerful argument precisely because it does not require Sextus to rely on any particular account of the nature of pain. Instead, he makes the problem an further instance of a most general problem for the business of forming secure opinions about something which cannot be directly perceived. We can recognise here a very common form of Pyrrhonist argument: Sextus has outlined a general *διαφωνία* between gout-sufferers. This disagreement is, furthermore, impossible to resolve in favor of any one rather than the other proposed descriptions of what it is like to experience the pain of gout. The ‘twisting-gout sufferers’ are no more authoritative than the ‘stabbing-gout sufferers’. And since these descriptions are competitors, we cannot simply accept all of them as capturing some aspect of the phenomenon such that they can be combined to give a single informative account. The difficulty is not a difficulty in principle of the procedure of asking for sufferers to describe their pain but is instead a difficulty in practice associated with the problems faced in trying to get any reliable and useful single answer to the question being posed. As far as we can tell from Sextus’ chosen response to this counter-argument, there is no sign of the idea that it is immediately and obviously wrong-headed to try to understand what it is like to experience gout by asking a gouty person to describe it to you; rather, it just turns out that it is terribly difficult to get any single clear and reliable answer to the question: What is it like to suffer from gout?

It is telling that Sextus puts the aim of the supposed inquiry as the grasp of “what pain is like *by nature*” (*ποῖός τις ὑπάρχει τὴν φύσιν*) since this casts the inquiry into the nature of pain in just the same form as many other imagined—and equally unsuccessful—inquiries throughout Sextus’ work. Usually, the required assumption is that in order for us to be able confidently to assert that something is F “by nature” it is necessary for it always to appear F, to appear F to all observers, to be unvaryingly F, and so on.<sup>19</sup> Given the success of the skeptic’s modes in generating *διαφωνία*

<sup>18</sup> See Celsus *De medicina* IV 31 and Ps. Galen *Def. med.* 292 (Kuhn vol. 19 427,6ff.): ποδάγρα ἐστὶ πάθος περὶ τοῖς ποσὶ γιγνόμενον πόνον ἐπιφέρον πασχόντων τῶν νεύρων οἷς μὲν μετὰ πυρώσεως οἷς δὲ μετὰ ψύξεως.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, *PH* I 93, 140 for the assertion that it is not possible to be sure about what some thing is “by nature” because of some variation in how it appears. Bett (1997),

this requirement is extremely hard to satisfy. The point to notice here, in that case, is that Sextus' imagined inquiry into what the pain of gout is "by nature" is no different in form from many other of his inquiries and it seems not to matter in the slightest that the item whose nature is being sought is a particular kind of pain.

#### IV

The second counter-argument which Sextus considers is similar to the first in so far as it too imagines an indirect method of acquiring knowledge of pain. This method might appeal to those who are prepared to allow god to experience pleasure but not pain since perhaps in that case god can be said indirectly to know pain through directly knowing pleasure. The treatment of this suggestion is extremely brief but it may still add something to the general picture outlined so far. Sextus rejects the idea that knowledge of pain may be acquired through experience of pleasure plus, presumably, some unspecified kind of act of imaginative contrast because he asserts once again that such a grasp of *pleasure* is impossible without direct experience of pain (πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ἀμήχανον μὴ πειραθέντα πόνου νόησιν ἡδονῆς λαβεῖν). A necessary condition, in other words, of the possession of knowledge of pleasure is the experience of pain. This blocks the objection by asserting that in order to possess the knowledge of pleasure which the opponent thinks will allow someone to know what pain is like by nature it is already necessary to have experienced pain directly, precisely what the opponent is attempting to avoid. It is not clear, we should notice, whether Sextus also thinks that it is true that a necessary condition of the possession of knowledge of pain is the experience of pleasure.

Unfortunately, Sextus' grounds for asserting that the experience of pain is necessary for knowledge of pleasure are not particularly strong. At AM IX 165 he asserts that pleasure itself consists in the removal of all things painful (κατὰ γὰρ τὴν παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγύνοντος ὑπεξαίρεσιν συνίστασθαι πέφυκεν). As is depressingly common in many ancient discussions of pleasure and pain, it remains ambiguous whether "removal"

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xiv–xvi, discusses what he calls the "Universality Requirement" in the context of AM XI's discussion of whether anything is good, bad, or indifferent by nature. See AM XI 69–78 and Bett's commentary *ad loc.*

(ὑπεξαίρεσις) refers here to the process of removing a pain or the end-point of a pain-free state. If the former, then Sextus does indeed appear to have a telling point.

If Sextus intends his premise about pleasure being the “removal” of all pain to mean that pleasure is simply the state of the absence of pain—what results when all pain has been removed—then it is not clear why we should agree that someone must have experienced pain in order to experience pleasure. Some philosophers who might be attracted to Sextus’ account of the nature of pleasure’s relationship to pain are the Epicureans since they, notoriously, did define pleasure as the absence of pain. Indeed, Sextus seems consciously to be echoing Epicurus’ *Kyria Doxa* 3 (which begins: ὁρὸς τοῦ μεγέθους τῶν ἡδονῶν ἢ παντὸς τοῦ ἀλγοῦντος ὑπεξαίρεσις). That Sextus is well aware that this is an Epicurean claim is confirmed by a passage in *AM* I in which Sextus is discussing the accusation that the Epicureans stole the central planks of their philosophical view from earlier poets. At *AM* I 273 it is this very claim that the removal of all pain is the limit of pleasures which is thought by some, says Sextus, to have been stolen from Homer. The source text offered is *Iliad* 1.469, and Sextus quite rightly dismisses the accusation at *AM* I 283 by pointing out that the Homeric line is in no way equivalent to the strong Epicurean claim.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is undeniable in that case that Sextus is relying in *AM* IX for this part of his answer to the objector on what he takes to be an Epicurean notion about the relationship between pleasure and pain. If we want to hold on to the thought that the primary opponent in this theological section is a Stoic then it is hard to imagine such an opponent would feel any great sympathy with this premise. And even the view that the range of opponents for this section is rather wider would have difficulty justifying this particular move; anyone inclined to disagree with this analysis of the relationship between pleasure and pain will feel that the present objection to Sextus’ overall argument has not been properly dismissed.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For a good discussion of this passage and on the general accusations of plagiarism against the Epicureans see Blank (1998), *ad loc.*

<sup>21</sup> Long (2006), 117, notes that it is unlikely that even a wider range of opponents would include the Epicureans. If Sextus is drawing on Academic arguments, Long thinks it very unlikely that Carneades wasted much time on the Epicureans. Long also notes that the Epicureans and skeptics would “constitute something of an unholy alliance” from the Stoic perspective.

Although Sextus is in no way prevented from reaching for such premises from any dogmatic philosophical school, the deployment of this Epicurean premise here certainly appears dialectically weak. One possibility is that the stretch of Sextus' text which deals with this counterargument may have been taken directly from an Epicurean source as a supplement to the Academic-inspired general thrust of this section. Certainly, the Epicureans were themselves involved in critical engagement with other rival theologies including the Stoics (see Velleius in Cicero *ND* I 18–56, especially 20–24 and 36–41) and it is not inconceivable that Sextus has adopted something of a 'cut-and-paste' approach on this occasion; while such a tactic will not show immediately that, say, the Stoics are fatally flawed in their attempt to respond, it still adds to the overall picture of a large-scale *διαφωνία* on these questions between the dogmatic schools.<sup>22</sup> At this point of Sextus' text, we might say, we find ourselves not so much engaged in the destructive dialectical inquiry into the coherence of a particular school's preferred set of theses; rather, we find ourselves enmired in the inconclusive disagreements and clashes of doctrine between the different dogmatic schools. The upshot appears to be that, even if in some last desperate move the Stoic were to try to defend himself by borrowing a thought from his bitter rivals the Epicureans, he will still have to concede defeat.

Sextus' argument remains sketchy nevertheless, even granted the unlikely truth of this Epicurean denial of an intermediate state between pleasure and pain. The Epicurean gods, for instance, live a constant pain-free life and thereby are always in a state of pleasure. They do so, apparently, without ever experiencing pain and do not have to experience pain in order to live a pleasure-filled life. Sextus can be fairly relaxed about this, however, since his claim is not that god cannot experience pleasure but that he cannot have the virtue which requires knowledge of what it is like to experience pain.

It is perhaps a shame that the textual evidence, particularly from *AM* I, overwhelmingly favors the Epicurean interpretation of Sextus' premise here. If we were able to offer an alternative interpretation of Sextus' premise according to which it asserts that pleasure can be experienced

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<sup>22</sup> Long (2006), 117: "Sextus uses an Epicurean analysis of pleasure as the absence of pain in one of his many arguments which turn the Stoic concept of virtue against their concept of god (*AM* IX 165–166)." At 117 n. 8 Long notes similarities between Sextus' expression here and Epicurean terms in *KD* 3 and Plutarch, *Non posse* 1092D.

only in the process of a pain or lack being removed (e.g. in the process of satisfying a painful hunger), then Sextus' argument would look rather more promising. Above all, it would rely on a more generally acceptable premise than the otherwise rather eccentric Epicurean view. This would allow the argument to be pertinent to a much wider range of potential opponents and it would indeed follow, on such a view of the relationship between pleasure and pain that god could not experience pleasure without also experiencing pain. We should recognise also that, interpreted in this manner, Sextus bypasses a further potential obstacle to the argument as it does appear in the text. We can ask whether it is impossible to recognise *that* one is experiencing pleasure (in the sense: to recognise that what one is experiencing *is pleasure*) without also having experienced pain. Even if it is impossible, this does not require that in order to experience pleasure (recognised as such or not) it is necessary to have experienced pain. In other words, a god may experience only pleasure without having experienced pain. There is a further question whether god can recognise that what he is experiencing is pleasure without also having experienced pain, but Sextus does not give this question any direct consideration. His argument, however, would on this interpretation cut through all such complications by directly asserting that what pleasure is in the removal of pain and, if "removal" here is the process of removal, then this settles the question straight away: any experience of pleasure will, given what pleasure is, also involve the experience of pain. (Indeed, this same point turned the other way round is a common anti-hedonist argument; for example, Socrates taunts Callicles with the thought that on his view of pleasure as a process of desire-satisfaction every pleasure will necessarily be accompanied by pain.)<sup>23</sup>

## V

We can now consider a more general philosophical question. The question whether and for what reasons Sextus thinks that to have knowledge of pain it is necessary to experience pain first-hand, so to speak, may turn out also to be relevant to a long-standing question about the scope of ancient skepticism and, more generally still, about the overall ancient treatment of what we might call subjectivity. On one influential

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<sup>23</sup> See Plato *Gorg.* 496c–497a.



interpretation of ancient skepticism, ancient skeptics are unlike their post-Cartesian counterparts in that they do not think that one's own bodily states and affections are the sort of things which can be subjected to the same procedure of doubt which is applied to questions about the world outside one's body.<sup>24</sup> An alternative view sees a less radical distinction between Sextan and, for example, Cartesian approaches to questions of knowledge and certainty, especially when those questions are applied to knowledge of one's own mental states.<sup>25</sup> A rough and ready account of 'subjectivity' holds that if there is such a thing as a subjective state then (i) there is a what-it-is-like to be in a given subjective state and (ii) a subjective state is something to which a given subject has a privileged mode of access, which might involve ideas such as (iia) the subject has incorrigible access to his subjective states and (iib) the subjective state is private to the subject concerned.<sup>26</sup>

We can ask two related questions about this passage in Sextus which might orient our inquiry in the right direction. First, is Sextus working with the notion that pain is what we might call a 'subjective state'? That is, does he consider pain to be a state such that there is 'something it is like to be in pain'? And does he offer any signs of thinking that a subject has some kind of privileged access to his or her own such subjective states? Second, does what Sextus says here suggest that there can be a reasonable question whether we can or indeed do have knowledge of such states?

The question of Sextus' attitude to pain would appear to be a good place to look for useful evidence in trying to answer these questions since he is certainly considering questions about the possibility of acquiring knowledge of pain in various ways. Furthermore, pain would seem to count as a particularly good example of a 'subjective state'. Pain, as we have already noted, is on at least one commonly-held view of its nature thought to have two characteristics often thought to belong to a 'subjective state', namely that it is (i) private and (ii) grasped only via some kind of introspection.<sup>27</sup> I certainly do not mean to claim that

<sup>24</sup> See esp. Burnyeat (1982), and in particular: 39–43.

<sup>25</sup> For a recent account of the debate and an argument against seeing a radical break between ancient and early-modern approaches see Fine (2003).

<sup>26</sup> This account of 'subjectivity' is deliberately rough and ready since there is some considerable disagreement over how subjectivity ought to be characterized. Here I borrow the general approach of Fine (2003), 193–194.

<sup>27</sup> For a helpful guide to recent thinking see Aydede (2006b). For another helpful

there is anything like a universal agreement about the nature of pain among modern philosophers, but only that this notion of pain as a subjective state is one of the popular conceptions and can be supported by some strong intuitions. Indeed, these assumptions are precisely what generate some rather difficult modern problems in dealing with pain since they make it rather difficult to see what relationship pain in this sense can have with physical damage and to account for the plausible assumption that pain is physically localised in distinct parts of the body. For our purposes, however, we can leave these difficulties aside for the moment; it will be enough if it is sufficiently agreed that pain would be an interesting test case for Sextus' treatment of so-called subjective states and, in particular, whether and how he is at all concerned about the question of our knowledge of them.

Sextus does seem to be working in this passage with the notion that pain is in some sense private. At least, as we have seen, he claims more than once that knowledge of pain can be acquired only by experiencing it first-hand. But this alone need not mean that he holds anything like a modern notion of pain as a private and subjective state, since there are various ways in which the privacy of pain might be explained or understood. In fact, the comment about the impossibility of learning about pain through interviewing gout sufferers would seem to fall perfectly in line with the view that, from the point of view of this argument, pain is inaccessible to anyone who is not suffering not because it is somehow an ontologically special mental state, but rather because it depends on a particular internal state of the sufferer which is inaccessible to all bar the sufferer himself. Perhaps the most telling point of all is this: Sextus is evidently prepared to entertain the proposal of simply asking people to describe their feelings as a possible method of acquiring knowledge of pain. That he should do so, even for the slightest moment and even if it is simply for the sake of argument, seems to me to point to an important difference between his conception of the nature of pain and the kinds of account of pain more prevalent in modern discussions.

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survey and taxonomy of recent approaches see Hardcastle (1999), 93–95. She takes a generally critical view of philosophical accounts (93): “In some sense, it does not matter which side wins in the end, because my conclusion would be the same either way: philosophers (and others) have misunderstood the fundamental complexity of pain processing and, as a result, often say or write silly things about pain.”

Imagine that Sextus, or one of his sources, held the notion that pain in general and kinds of pain in particular are private in an interesting and special, perhaps a 'strong' way.<sup>28</sup> In that case, in reply to the suggestion that someone who has never experienced the pain of gout (let alone someone such as god who has never experienced pain at all) might acquire knowledge of what the pain of gout is like simply by talking to people who have felt gout, we could easily imagine the following sort of response. It would be quite proper, on the basis of a strong notion of the privacy of pain, to reply simply that of course it is impossible to acquire knowledge of the pain of gout in the proposed indirect fashion. This is because pain is the sort of thing that is private in a strong way. Person X's pain is not hidden from Person Y in the way that the interior of Person X's private apartment is hidden from Person Y. Rather, pain is private in the sense that it is an essentially first-personal subjective experience. Since that is the kind of thing pain is, you cannot know what it is like to feel the pain of gout without yourself feeling gout, whether or not people generally describe their experiences in a consistent fashion.<sup>29</sup> Such a response can rely on the idea that pain has a certain irreducible what-it-is-like-ness (or *quale*) which cannot be accessed in any way other than through first-personal experience.<sup>30</sup> Nothing in Sextus' argument come even close to saying such a thing.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For an account of what this 'strong' sense of privacy might be see Tsouna (1998b), 249.

<sup>29</sup> Compare Locke (1964) and Taylor (1970). For much of the modern discussion of these issues, the impetus has been the various questions raised about the privacy of pain in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, § 246–315. Compare Kripke (1982), 119–145, on Wittgenstein's treatment of pain in the context of "the problem of other minds".

<sup>30</sup> This is the line of reasoning that leads some philosophers to argue that in order to save god's omniscience we must find some way of allowing him this kind of direct first-personal experiential knowledge. See above p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Although it is tempting to generalise, not all modern approaches share that particular 'strong' notion of the private nature of pain. But even those that do not could nevertheless give their own account of why it is that the pain of gout cannot be known indirectly. Consider, for example, Ryle (1949), 199 (see also 196–200), on why it is that a cobbler cannot feel pain of the shoe pinching Ryle: "My tweak is not hidden from the cobbler because it is inside me, either as being literally inside my skin, or as being, metaphorically, in a place to which he has no access. On the contrary, it cannot be described, as needles can, as being either internal or external to a common object like myself, nor as being hidden or unhidden." For Ryle, the mistake is to think that such an experience is to be located somewhere, literally or metaphorically, internal or external, and that this is why we call it private. My pains are private only in the 'philosophically unexciting' sense that they are *my* pains rather than yours. That Ryle should be reacting against what might be thought of as a 'Cartesian' notion of privacy is of course not surprising given his general aim here of undermining Cartesian assumptions about the mental.

Let me be clear: I am not particularly interested in what seems to me to be the unsurprising result that in the most general terms Sextus does not think about pain as Wittgenstein, Descartes, or Ryle did, nor that he does not appear to have a notion of qualia such as appears in Frank Jackson's thought-experiment about Mary the scientist. There are evidently any number of important aspects of the way in which these discussions tackle the topic which are quite alien to Sextus' concerns. For example, often these modern accounts tend to approach the question by wondering about the possibility and procedure of moving from a personal and first-personal experience of pain to a confident or meaningful ascription of similar experience to others. In one way or another this is made problematic if pain is in a relevant sense 'private'.<sup>32</sup> Sextus, on the other hand, is interested in whether it is possible to acquire a conception of pain without the first-personal experience of pain. He is not in the least bit worried here about whether in fact gout-sufferers do experience pain. Instead, he assumes that they do and wonders how we might be able to come to know what they are experiencing.

Further, although not all modern discussions of pain are in agreement over the nature of its privacy, nevertheless, in one way or another, it is tempting to think that the reason why it is not possible to come to know how someone else is feeling when they feel pain is intimately connected with pain's being a certain kind of thing. Pain is perhaps an irreducibly first-personal kind of experience or else it is perhaps something which is not properly construed as an object of perception at all, whether internal and private or external and public. In the most general terms, we might say that such accounts of the privacy of pain, however they might differ from one another, base this privacy on some account of what pain is—whether they take it to be a sensation, a quale, a manner of behaving, or something else—and on some kind of notion of what it is to be an experiencing subject; they start by asking how we ought to make sense of the appearance each of us has of having an inner conscious life. The contrast between this *general* approach and what we find in Sextus is what I take to be important and worth greater emphasis.

Sextus' argument rules out the indirect acquisition of knowledge of pain on what in comparison might appear to be rather mundane grounds. Such acquisition is impossible because the reports of the peculiar nature of gout which we would receive from people who have directly experi-

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<sup>32</sup> See e.g. Malcolm (1958), 974–976.

enced this pain are such that no single, clear, and consistent authoritative picture will emerge. In a way, we might still say that it is because the gout is internal or, if we like, private to the gout-sufferer that no one else can access it in such a way as to be able to acquire knowledge of it. An external observer, Person Y, might see the external symptoms of Person X's gout, notice Person X's groans and the like and might ask X to tell him what he feels. But Y cannot in this way perceive or come to know the pain of gout. Sextus' argument does, after all, turn on the claim that in a case such as this we are reliant on the reports of those people to whom the pain of gout is evident, namely the sufferers themselves. Yet crucially, Sextus' treatment of this possibility suggests that he is not working with an idea that pain is private in a way which would render such a form of inquiry immediately wrong-headed. Instead the problem faced on this occasion is a very familiar and general one which appears time and again in his skeptical inquiries: it is a problem concerned primarily with disagreement and the apparently irresolvable nature of the conflicting appearances or reports. In this respect, the privacy in question is not a special form of privacy required by the simple nature of pain itself. The pain of gout plays a role in this argument much like other supposed non-evident (ἄδηλα) things, beliefs about which are subject to all the familiar problems of the skeptical modes.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of Sextus' account at AM VIII 145–147 of the senses in which something might be non-evident, we can perhaps wonder whether someone else's pain is “naturally” (φύσει) and permanently non-evident like the “intelligible pores” supposed by some doctors or the infinite extracosmic void supposed by the Stoics or else “absolutely” (καθάπαξ) non-evident such as whether the number of stars or grains of sand in

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<sup>33</sup> On questions of the privacy of the mental in ancient philosophy, perhaps the best evidence for an ancient acceptance of such a view comes from the Cyrenaic school. See, for example, the report at AM VII 196–197. For full discussion see Tsouna (1998b) who is cautious about making too close an assimilation between ancient and modern views. The privacy and incorrigibility in question in the ancient accounts seems to be related to the fact that the states in question are internal to the subject rather than simply to the fact that these are specifically mental states. (See e.g. her comment at 251: “[I]t is not the case that our neighbor's *pathē* are private to him if and only if they are mental. They are private because they are his experiences rather than ours, because they occur in him rather than us, and because ‘no *pathos* is common to us all’”) Even in the case of the Cyrenaics, Tsouna concludes that they “operated with a much weaker notion of privacy than modern theories of language and meaning” (1998b, 252; her n. 13 refers specifically to the privacy of pain).

Libya is odd or even. But in the case of neither of these categories is the non-evidence based on the object in question having some special ontological status.

## VI

Sextus' theological argument is powerful and compelling if we accept the premise, which he thinks must be endorsed by his dogmatic interlocutor, that wisdom requires a particular kind of knowledge of what pain is like and we further agree that this knowledge can be acquired only via the experience of pain. I hope to have shown that the argument is worth exploring for at least two reasons. For those considering Sextus' methods, it is interesting because in the course of the argument Sextus seems to reach for a variety of different dogmatic positions, now relying on Stoic principles to undermine general Stoic conceptions of god, now relying on Epicurean premises to undermine possible Stoic replies. The dogmatists, in short, are engaged in a tangled and irresolvable set of disagreements over theology while all agreeing, as Sextus reminds us in the opening to this section, that getting theology right is an essential part of any positive philosophical position (*AM* IX 13). The more Sextus can emphasise the dogmatic *diaphōnia* and the apparent impossibility of reaching any satisfactory resolution of their difficulties, the less persuasive the overall project of dogmatic natural philosophy will appear.

For those considering the assessment found in this stretch of *AM* of the nature of mental states themselves, this argument is interesting because Sextus shows no sign whatsoever of sharing the notion of pain as by nature something essentially and strongly private and first-personal. Nor does he show any sign of thinking that he could ascribe such a view to his dogmatic opponents, despite the fact that it could aid his case considerably. On the other hand, he is prepared for the sake of argument to consider a means of acquiring a knowledge of what a particular kind of pain is like indirectly and in a third-personal fashion, even though he ends by characteristically declaring that this suggested means of indirect acquisition is not particularly plausible. Knowledge of pain is therefore best—and perhaps only—acquired through first-hand experience. It is still likely, for all this argument shows, that Sextus does not entertain the possibility that one might, once experiencing the pain of gout, doubt whether in fact one's body is damaged or causing pain. In that sense, perhaps Burnyeat, for example, is still right to claim that for

the Pyrrhonist skeptic and unlike the Cartesian skeptic, "one's own body has not yet become for philosophy a part of the external world" (1982, 42–43).

Nevertheless, Sextus does not, at least for the purposes of this argument, appear to consider the view that one's own states like the experience of the pain of gout are not 'knowledge-apt'. From the point of view of this argument, at least, it seems that there is indeed a genuine notion entertained in this passage that it is possible to have *knowledge* of one's own pain, for example of what it is like to feel the pain of gout. That knowledge may well be acquired only once one does experience the pain of gout and it may well be that feeling the pain of gout is both a necessary and sufficient condition of knowing what the pain of gout is "by nature". Once again, this may be a notion borrowed or plausibly ascribed to the particular dogmatists under current scrutiny and we should therefore be wary about saying that it is something that Sextus himself shares. But, even so, it is important to remark that on this occasion Sextus seems prepared to mount an argument about god based on the hypothesis that the special quality of the pain of gout is something that someone may or may not know.

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## SKEPTICISM AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Filip Grgić

### I

According to Sextus Empiricus, the Pyrrhonian skeptics “live in accordance with everyday practice (βιωτική τήρησις)” (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [PH] I 23).<sup>1</sup> They follow an ordinary life or ordinary experience (ἐμπειρία) by conforming to common preconceptions (προλήψεις) and appearances (φαινόμενα), and this is how their life differs from the life of dogmatic philosophers, which is based on doctrinal beliefs (δόγματα).<sup>2</sup> By insisting on the skeptics’ favorable attitude toward everyday life, Sextus wants to support his rejection of the charge that taking a skeptical position entails inactivity and complete detachment from the world: while it is true to say that the skeptics do not live according to philosophical theory, in respect of which they are indeed inactive, they are active as far as non-philosophical practice is concerned (AM XI 165). Nevertheless, his intention is not only defensive, but he also sees the skeptics as champions and supporters of ordinary life, which he takes to be superior to a doctrinal or philosophical life. Moreover, the skeptics are allies to everyday life in its struggle against the dogmatists who have risen up against its preconceptions (AM VIII 158): “Hence not only do we not conflict with everyday life, but we actually join the struggle on its side, assenting without holding beliefs (ἀδοξάστως) to what it has found convincing and taking a stand against the private fictions of the dogmatists” (PH II 102).<sup>3</sup> The idea that the skeptics follow an ordinary way of living seems to include two things: first, that they are engaged in the *activities*

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<sup>1</sup> Τήρησις is ‘observation’ (as in Annas & Barnes 2000; see Barnes 1997, 82 n. 89) or ‘regimen’ (as in Mates 1996). The word is common in writings of the Empirical doctors. I follow Bett (1997) in using ‘practice’ (see *Adversus Mathematicos* [AM] XI 165), but nothing in my argument depends on the exact meaning.

<sup>2</sup> See PH I 23–24, 231, 237; II 102, 246, 254, 258; III 235; AM VIII 158.

<sup>3</sup> All translations from PH are by Annas and Barnes (2000), occasionally with modifications.

that are characteristic of ordinary people, and, second, that they possess *mental states* that are characteristic of ordinary people or that are, at any rate, sufficient to explain the activities in which the skeptics engage.

Sextus' insistence on the close alliance of skepticism and everyday life is in several respects deeply problematic. To begin with, it may sound odd to hear a skeptic saying that he advocates everyday life and that everyday life is superior to life that includes philosophical beliefs. We are accustomed to think of ordinary, non-philosophical life—or, as we would nowadays say, life based on common sense beliefs—as seriously challenged by skeptical arguments. Skeptics want to argue that our common sense claims that we know something, globally or locally, are not tenable, and that common sense beliefs cannot be rationally justified. In this respect, philosophical skepticism can be seen as the denial of common sense. Common sense can at best be excused from skeptical attack by shifting skeptical arguments to a level or a context above the everyday. Nonetheless, save for those who endorse a version of the so-called common sense philosophy, *if* subjected to skeptical scrutiny, common sense judgments cannot be immune to skeptical attack, let alone be considered skeptical allies. This, of course, does not apply to every form of philosophical skepticism. With moral skepticism, for example, things are probably rather more complicated. However, the traditional skepticism about knowledge or about the external world, inspired by Cartesian arguments, is an obvious adversary to common sense.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, Pyrrhonian skepticism is a special form of skepticism, evidently different from traditional external world skepticism inspired by Cartesian arguments. It seems, however, that there are some reasons to think that a Pyrrhonist's attitude toward common sense must be the same as the attitude of the traditional external world skeptic, and that the idea of the alliance between Pyrrhonism and everyday life is in many respects shaky. For one thing, Sextus' urging that the Pyrrhonists are champions of everyday life seems to contradict their central recommendation, that we should suspend judgment about everything. For, obviously, on any plausible conception of ordinary life, pursuing an attitude of suspension of judgment because of the equal force of the opposed claims cannot be seen as part of such a life. The Pyrrhonists say that they live without beliefs, but this is certainly not the manner in which ordinary people

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<sup>4</sup> On skepticism and common sense, see Lemos (2004), esp. 1–13; see also Bett (1993), esp. 364–366.

live their lives; indeed, ordinary life is permeated with various kinds of beliefs, including doctrinal beliefs, as Sextus himself recognizes. In addition, the Pyrrhonists insist that the ultimate goal of human action is tranquility in matters of belief and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us (*PH* I 25, 30). It is far from clear that tranquility in matters of belief and moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us figures prominently among the ultimate goals of ordinary people's lives. However, if this is meant as a serious recommendation as to how to achieve a desirable human life, then the Pyrrhonists cannot insulate their skeptical attitude from everyday life and follow it only in their discussion against the doctrinal philosophers.

According to one tradition in the interpretation of Pyrrhonism, the appearance of Pyrrhonian skeptics as followers of everyday life is strongly supported by the fact that they do not see themselves just as philosophical skeptics, but, more importantly, as skeptics about philosophy and science.<sup>5</sup> They suspend judgment about what is said by *philosophers*, as far as *philosophical argument* is concerned, they do not hold beliefs about non-evident things, which are investigated in *sciences*, etc.<sup>6</sup>—that is, the targets of their criticism are philosophy and science, or any theoretically loaded domain. Hence, it seems that the Pyrrhonists are entitled to claim that they follow everyday life simply because they do hold ordinary, everyday beliefs, and it is only doctrinal, philosophical, or scientific, beliefs that are suspended. This does not mean that the Pyrrhonists are satisfied with ordinary life as such, since ordinary people's actions, just like philosophers', are sometimes governed by certain doctrinal beliefs. However, what we would get if we adopted skeptical strategy and suspended judgment about doctrinal issues would be just an ordinary human life free from what is, according to the Pyrrhonists, dogmatic vanity and deceit. On this view, then, the Pyrrhonists may be seen as reformers of ordinary human life, but not as very deep and radical reformers.

The difficulties with this view are well known and widely discussed. The central question is whether the Pyrrhonian suspension is indeed limited to theoretically loaded domains or the Pyrrhonists are rather

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<sup>5</sup> A classical statement of such a view is found in Frede (1997); see also Brennan (2000). For the difference between philosophical skepticism and skepticism about philosophy, see Fogelin (1994), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. e.g. *PH* I 13, 20, 215; II 22, 26, 80, 95, 104; III 6, 13, 29, 56, 65, 81, 135.

committed to suspending every belief, despite of what they themselves occasionally say and despite the reasons that seem to support such an interpretation of their position. A further question is whether the beliefs, or mental states in general, that are left over and untouched by skeptical inquiries are sufficient to account for the actions that are characteristic of ordinary people. In any case, the idea is that if one manages to show that after suspension, the skeptics can retain the attitude toward the world that is typical for non-doctrinal attitudes of ordinary people, and if having such an attitude is sufficient for the explanation of ordinary human actions, then one may accept the Pyrrhonists' insistence that they are supporters of ordinary human life. That is to say, the Pyrrhonists' insistence that they are supporters of ordinary human life is justifiable if one can appropriately restrict the domain of their suspension and identify resources that are sufficient for the answer to the charge of inactivity.

If, on the other hand, the Pyrrhonian suspension is taken as unrestricted, that is, as extending to all beliefs, including beliefs of ordinary people, then we get a completely different picture of the Pyrrhonists' attitude toward everyday life.<sup>7</sup> In this case, we can no longer argue that the Pyrrhonists advocate ordinary life as led by non-philosophers, but we must suppose that they want to make a deep reform of ordinary life in order to adjust it to skeptical demands. It follows that the *βίος* that the Pyrrhonists supposedly follow is not just a way of living as such, but specifically a Pyrrhonian way of living, which is illustrated, for instance, in some ancient biographies of Pyrrho. If so, then it becomes much more difficult to identify resources that are, according to the Pyrrhonists, necessary for any sensible human life.

Therefore, on both interpretations, an important qualification should be attached to Sextus' insistence that the Pyrrhonists are supporters of ordinary life: they are not just supporters of ordinary life but they want to be its reformers as well. Thus, when Sextus compares his skeptical procedures with doctors', the patients he is trying to cure are not only dogmatic philosophers but ordinary people as well, as far as they hold various kinds of (unacceptable) beliefs. The difference between the two views is only in the depth of the reform. Hence, it seems that everything depends on how we understand the phrase "without holding beliefs" (*ἄδοξάστως*) in Sextus' account of the skeptics' way of life. According to the former view, which sees the Pyrrhonists primarily as skeptics about

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<sup>7</sup> See, above all, Burnyeat (1997a) and Barnes (1997).

philosophy and science—and which, following Gail Fine (2000, 81), can be called the Some Belief View—the Pyrrhonists follow ordinary life by eliminating from it all doctrinal, and only doctrinal, beliefs, and the result, looking from outside at least, should be a life that does not differ profoundly from the life of non-philosophers. According to the latter, which Fine calls the No Belief View, the Pyrrhonists follow ordinary life by eliminating from it all beliefs. This is the proposal of the very deep reform, but the external appearance of such a life is not very clear.

So it seems that explanation of the Pyrrhonists' attitude toward ordinary life depends on the resolution of the Some Belief View—No Belief View dispute. Rather than entering into this complex and widely discussed problem of Pyrrhonian scholarship, in this paper, I will limit myself to a much more modest objective. It seems to me that regardless of whether we see the Pyrrhonists as deep or superficial reformers, both views require an answer to the question what it is that they want to reform. That is to say, what conception of everyday life the skeptics have in mind when they say that they live everyday life without holding beliefs? I believe that the answer to this question is important for the understanding of ancient Pyrrhonism, but that it has also some philosophical interest of its own.

## II

Let me first elaborate on the problem a little bit. At *PH* I 23–24, a passage that is in many respects central to our topic, Sextus gives a list of items included in “everyday practice”:

Thus, attending to the appearances, we live in accordance with everyday practice, without holding beliefs (ἀδοξάστως)—for we are not able to be utterly inactive. This everyday practice seems to be fourfold, and to consist in [1] guidance by nature, [2] necessitation by feelings, [3] handing down of laws and customs, and [4] teaching of kinds of expertise. [1] By nature's guidance we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking. [2] By the necessitation of feelings, hunger conducts us to food and thirst to drink. [3] By the handing down of customs and laws, we accept, from an everyday point of view, that piety is good and impiety bad. [4] By teaching of kinds of expertise we are not inactive in those which we accept. And we say all this without holding beliefs (ἀδοξάστως).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The same list occurs at *PH* I 237. *PH* I 231 lists only laws, customs, and natural feelings.

Much of the understanding of this passage depends on how we take the word ἀδοξάστως, which qualifies both the skeptics' way of life and Sextus' account of their way of life. I will concisely discuss it at the end of the paper.<sup>9</sup> First, I would like to point to some problems concerning the phrase "to live in accordance with everyday practice without holding beliefs."

This phrase can be taken in two ways. On the one hand, it can suggest that there is something like ordinary human life ("everyday practice"), which can be described independently of, and prior to, any skeptical (or dogmatic, for that matter) intervention in it, and which then is attended to by the skeptics in a special way, namely, without holding beliefs. On the other hand, we may take it that Sextus does not want to suggest that there is an independent domain of ordinary life and that there is a special way of approaching it, but that he wants to refer to a completely new domain, the domain of a skeptical way of living, which is characterized by the absence of beliefs but which can nevertheless be called "everyday life". These two ways of reading the phrase correspond to viewing Pyrrhonists as superficial or as deep reformers.

If we adopt the first reading, that there is an independent domain of everyday life, then what we would like to know is how to describe this domain: what is it that the skeptics follow without holding beliefs? At first glance, it seems that Sextus is clear about this: everyday life consists of activities like perceiving, thinking, taking food or drink, following traditional customs and laws, and teaching arts. Taken in such a straightforward manner, however, the list is unsatisfactory for two main reasons. On the one hand, it is too narrow, for it is obvious that ordinary people are engaged in a much broader range of activities. The point is not that ordinary people hold beliefs, both doctrinal and non-doctrinal (for what we are trying to specify is everyday life as it is prior to, and independent of, the skeptical intervention in it), but that typical human life includes activities—such as cultivating certain virtues, enjoying intimate personal relations, engaging in certain activities exclusively for the sake of pleasure, making new social institutions, creating works of art, etc.—which are not mentioned in the list and it is not even clear what Sextus would make of them. In addition, the dogmatists would argue (and it seems that Sextus would concur: see *PH* I 26) that the main

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<sup>9</sup> On ἀδοξάστως, see Barnes (1997), 78–79 n. 77, and below, p. 89 and note 27.

characteristic of human life is the pursuit of truth or knowledge. On the other hand, Sextus' list seems too generous. For instance, while handing down laws and customs is here included among everyday practices, in Sextus' discussion of Aenesidemus' tenth mode, it is among the items about which we should suspend judgment (*PH* I 163).

Suppose, to put the problem in more general terms, that we want to say of some proposition that it is a common sense proposition. What conditions should it satisfy to count as such? The problem is that it is very difficult to articulate the relevant conditions. For instance, while the proposition that honey is sweet may seem to be a typical member of the class of ordinary life propositions, it is also obvious that the same proposition may belong to the class of highly theoretically loaded propositions, if it is taken as based on the insight into the real nature of honey. Likewise, while it is undoubtedly a part of ordinary human life to say of someone that she is capable to see, this statement can also be taken doctrinally, say as based on the insight into human psychology or physiology.

An obvious reaction to that problem is to say that we should abandon the distinction between the domains and adopt instead the distinction between contexts in which sentences are uttered, or between ways in which propositions are taken, and the like. Thus, "Honey is sweet" is a constituent of ordinary life if uttered by someone during breakfast but not if uttered by a scientist in a laboratory. However, why would the former context be called ordinary and the latter not? If the relevant difference is in the way in which a proposition is taken—so that, for instance, "Honey is sweet" is an ordinary life sentence if in its uttering we do not imply that honey is really, objectively, sweet—then we must abandon the idea under consideration, namely, that there is a distinct domain of ordinary life which can then be described as something that the skeptics live without holding (doctrinal) beliefs, since in this case, the lack of (doctrinal) beliefs is already included in the description of ordinary life. It follows, then, that it is difficult to attach an independent sense to "everyday practice" in the phrase "to live in accordance with everyday practice without holding beliefs": it is either vaguely different from the sense of "non-everyday practice" or it already contains a reference to a skeptical qualification.

If we abandon the distinction between domains or contexts and adopt the second reading proposed above, that is, that Sextus is not interested in picking out an independent domain of ordinary life which is then followed by the skeptics in a specific way, but that he wants to stress the

fact that a life without holding beliefs *is* ordinary human life, then we understand the skeptics as deep reformers. It is easily seen that every item on Sextus' list can be pursued in both a dogmatic and skeptical manner. Thus, one can follow traditional laws and customs by having additional beliefs that they are objectively good, and arts can be taught by having additional beliefs that there are such things as teachers, learners, cognition, system of cognitions, etc. Skeptics want to pursue them without these additional beliefs, doctrinal or non-doctrinal (whatever that may mean), and this is what their *ordinary* life amounts to. If Sextus' list appears too narrow, we may try to subsume what seems to be missing under [1]–[4] and take it as pursued without additional beliefs. Thus, cultivating certain virtues, as typical human activity, can perhaps be subsumed under [3], enjoying intimate personal relations can be subsumed under [1] or [2] or even [3], pursuit of truth under [1] or [2], and so on. If, on the other hand, Sextus' list appears too broad, we may assume that following traditional laws and customs is here taken as not including additional beliefs, while in the tenth mode it should be taken as including such beliefs, etc.

In this case, however, it seems very odd to call such a life "ordinary". A more pressing problem is that, according to this view, the scope of everyday life becomes too broad, since there is no limit to the range of propositions that the skeptics approach without holding beliefs, including philosophical and scientific propositions. That is to say, if the qualification "without holding beliefs" is already included in the meaning of "everyday practice," then there is nothing with which the latter can be contrasted. Hence, there is nothing to which everyday life can be superior. Yet, Sextus not only insists that ordinary life should be preferred over philosophical life when pursued in a skeptical manner, but that it should be preferred as such. In this, he is followed by philosophers who, for various reasons, advocate common sense, for they share the idea that when common sense beliefs are contrasted with philosophical beliefs which are incompatible with them—this applies especially to skeptical beliefs about the existence of various kinds of things—then it is always more reasonable to accept the former. A very clear statement of the priority of common sense beliefs is found in the following passage from Moore:

This, after all, you know, really is a finger; there is no doubt about it: I know it, and you all know it. And I think we may safely challenge any philosopher to bring forward any argument in favour either of the proposition that we do not know it, or of the proposition that it is not true, which does not



at some point rest upon some premiss which is beyond comparison, less certain, than the proposition which it is designed to attack.

(Moore 1960, 228)

One can hardly deny that a Pyrrhonist should take the same attitude toward common sense beliefs, if she is indeed an advocate of ordinary life. In Sextus' writings, however, ordinary life is often presented either as one side of an undecidable dissent or itself as a battlefield where dissenting sides are opposed, and in neither of these cases, it is granted priority. Thus, when introducing the first mode of Agrippa, Sextus says: "[W]e find that undecidable dissension about the matter proposed has come about both in ordinary life and among philosophers" (*PH* I 165). A typical example of the involvement of ordinary life in undecidable dissensions and its apparent overthrowing is Sextus' discussion of motion, to which I will shortly turn: while philosophers such as Parmenides, Melissus, and Diodorus Cronus say that there is no such thing, ordinary life and philosophers from Pythagoras to the Stoics or Epicureans say that motion exists (*PH* III 65, *AM* X 45). Since the skeptics are forced to admit that they suspend judgment about whether motion exists, it is not immediately clear what is the status of ordinary judgments in this dispute, and how the skeptics can still insist that they give priority to ordinary life and its judgments. The same holds for the dispute about place (*PH* III 120, *AM* X 7–8; see also Burnyeat 1997b, 101–111) or number (*PH* III 151); and Sextus, to turn to Moore's example, suspends judgment about whether there is such a thing as a body (*PH* III 49; for a thorough discussion, see Fine 2003, 362–369). Therefore, it is not clear how the Pyrrhonists can endorse the principle of the priority of ordinary judgments over doctrinal ones.

### III

To illustrate these problems, let me briefly consider Sextus' discussion of motion (*PH* III 65–81; a much fuller discussion is found at *AM* X 45–168; see also Bailey 2002, 200–205). As usual, he wants to show that we must suspend judgment about whether motion exists: while some say that it exists and some that it does not exist, the skeptics insist that there is equipollence between these claims, that is, that neither of them can be overthrown, so that we should suspend judgment. Those who say that motion does not exist, rely on abstract philosophical arguments. Thus, we find an argument that nothing moves because nothing is moved either by

itself or by something else (67–69). There is also Diodorus Cronus' argument against motion,<sup>10</sup> and Sextus even refutes three counterarguments against it (72–75). Finally, we find an argument according to which nothing moves because a thing can move neither over its first part nor over a divisible interval all at once (76–81).

On the positive side, the one that affirms the existence of motion, we do not find philosophical arguments, but Sextus appeals to everyday life and to the evident facts (ἐνάργεια):

[I]f there is no such thing as motion, they say, how does the sun travel from its rising to its setting, and how does it produce the seasons of the year, which come about because it is near to us or far from us? How do ships which have put out from harbour come in to other far distant ports? In what way does someone who denies motion leave his house and return to it again? These considerations, they say, are perfectly uncontestable. (This is why one of the Cynics, when the argument against motion was propounded, gave no answer but stood up and walked away, establishing by his action and evidently (διὰ τῆς ἐναργείας) that motion is real.) This, then, is how these people attempt to discountenance those who take the contrary position. (PH III 66)

The result is that motion no more exists than it does not exist: it exists as far as what is evident is concerned, or as far as everyday life is concerned, but it does not exist as far as philosophical argument is concerned. Therefore, Sextus does not say that everyday life has priority. The arguments based on everyday life are just as credible as abstract philosophical arguments. The conclusion seems to be that it is not possible to say whether *motion* exists—not that it is not possible to say whether *motion as conceived by philosophers* exists. If we rely on common sense beliefs, one might say, then we precipitately assent to the proposition that there is such a thing as motion—not to the proposition that there is such a thing as motion as far as philosophical argument, or philosophical sense of the term “motion”, is concerned.<sup>11</sup>

Such an abandonment of the principle of the priority of common sense can be seen as one of the motivations for the objection that the skeptics

<sup>10</sup> PH III 71: “If something is moved, then it is moved either in a place in which it is or in a place in which it is not. But neither in a place in which it is (it is at rest in it, since it is in it), nor a place in which it is not (a thing can neither act nor be acted upon where it is not). Therefore nothing moves.”

<sup>11</sup> The similar conclusion regarding Sextus' arguments about place is found in Burnyeat (1997b), esp. 106.

reject appearances (*PH* I 19–20).<sup>12</sup> This is a particular case of a general objection that the skeptical position is basically incoherent. Sextus does not say who is the author of the objection and what are the arguments behind it. We may freely assume, however, that his opponent is confused by the skeptical practice in which appearances are opposed either to other appearances or to thoughts, and by the fact that suspension of judgment implies rejection of both sides. Sextus gives two answers to this objection:<sup>13</sup>

- (a) “As we said before, we do not overturn anything which leads us, without our willing it, to assent in accordance with a passive impression—and these things are precisely appearances”. (*PH* I 19)
- (b) “When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear, and what we investigate is not appearance but what is said about appearance—and this is different from investigating appearance itself”. (*ibid.*)

Sextus implies in (a) that the criterion of whether a mental state is acceptable for the skeptics is the manner in which it is formed: they accept only those mental states which are the result of passive and involuntary assent. Thus, a skeptic cannot but admit that it appears to him that a ship has come in from one port to another, and his having such an appearance is not what he rejects. The problem is that it seems that the same must hold for what is opposed to this appearance, for example, the thought that Diodorean arguments against the existence of motion are valid. For, as we know, the skeptics oppose appearances and thoughts. The word “appearance” is sometimes used by Sextus in the sense of “the object of perception”, as in the definition of skepticism (*PH* I 8–10) or in the account of the forms in which the oppositions are made (*PH* I 31–34). However, it is also used in a wider sense, including both the

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<sup>12</sup> Although presumably not the only motivation. It is quite possible that the objection was more complex. Perhaps the opponent was insisting that “(a) It appears to me that *p* but (b) I do not believe that *p*” is self-contradictory, so that the skeptics must reject either (a) (appearances) or (b) (and admit that they hold beliefs).

<sup>13</sup> Actually, he gives three answers; see the last sentence in I 20: (c) “And if we do propound arguments directly against appearances, it is not because we want to reject the appearances that we set them out, but rather to display the rashness of the dogmatists.” It seems to me, however, that (c) is just a variety of (a), since for the skeptics, a proper method of investigation whether a thing is such as it appears is to set out oppositions among appearances.

objects of perception and the objects of thought.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of the exact scope of the word “appearance”, however, it seems that Sextus understands thinking as a matter of passive acceptance, analogously to perception:

For a skeptic is not, I think, barred from having thought, if it arises during the discussions which give him a passive impression and appear evidently to him and if it does not at all imply the reality of what is being thought of—for we can think, as they say, not only of real things but also of unreal things. Hence someone who suspends judgement maintains his sceptical condition while investigating and thinking; for it has been made clear [(a) above] that he assents to any impression given by way of a passive appearance insofar as it appears to him.<sup>15</sup> (PH II 10)

Thus, when tasting a piece of honey, the skeptic becomes “sweetened”, that is, it appears to him that honey sweetens. His being sweetened is a mental state that is, first, evident to him, i.e. it is not the result of an inference or inquiry, and, second, forced upon him, since he has received the impression involuntarily and cannot but acquiesce in it. Likewise, in the case of thoughts, Sextus seems to be arguing, when hearing an argument given by an atomist according to which honey is neither sweet nor not-sweet, thanks to his natural ability to think (PH I 24), he forms a thought, understands this argument and its force, and cannot but admit that it appears to him as, say, valid.<sup>16</sup> As an explanation, or part of an explanation, of the process of thinking, this, of course, seems quite unsatisfactory. Regardless of that, however, I do not see that Sextus could offer any reason as to how, given his overall position, he could argue that the mental states he is in when tasting honey during breakfast or when seeing a ship coming could come about differently than the mental states he is in when hearing an atomist saying that honey is neither sweet nor not-sweet or when hearing Diodorus arguing that motion does not exist.

Thus, if mental states typical of (skeptical) ordinary life are characterized by the manner in which they are formed, that is, by the fact that they are instances of passive acceptance, then Sextus is not able to retain the principle of the priority of everyday judgments, and this is what

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<sup>14</sup> See, above all AM VIII 362 and PH II 10; Frede (1973), 809–810; Burnyeat (1997a), 39. Perhaps more importantly for our present topic, see PH III 136–138, where Sextus says that “so far as the appearances go, there seems to be such a thing as time; but so far as what is said about it goes, it appears non-subsistent” (136), and then, as instances of appearances, he lists various philosophical definitions of time.

<sup>15</sup> I retain the manuscript λόγων in the first sentence.

<sup>16</sup> Some implications of this are discussed in Grgić (2008), 443–444.

the objection about skeptics' rejection of appearances implies concerning Sextus' insistence that the skeptics are supporters of everyday life. It follows not only that the skeptics suspend judgment about what is evidently given in everyday life and thus abandon the priority principle; it also follows that the manner in which mental states are formed cannot be the basis for the demarcation of everyday from non-everyday life, since on this criterion, life according to any appearance turns out to be everyday life, including life according to the appearance that motion does not exist. The same follows if, instead of the manner in which a mental state is formed, we take its ontological implications and say that for a skeptic, being in a certain mental state has no ontological implications whatsoever, while for a dogmatist, it implies the reality of its object. Now, while the lack of ontological implications certainly *is* the basic characteristic of the skeptics' mental states, it does *not* say anything either about the demarcation or the priority problems. Sextus cannot maintain that what makes the skeptics' life ordinary is the fact that when it appears to them that *p*, then they necessarily do not have an additional belief that it is really the case that *p*. For, since *p* can stand for any proposition whatsoever, it follows that ordinary life has to do with an unlimited range of propositions. That is to say, even though having no additional dogmatic beliefs is the mark of the skeptical way of life, it does not tell us why such a life can be described as ordinary.

It seems that Sextus' remark (b) is not of much help either. (b) says that skeptics do not reject appearances since they do not investigate appearances, but what is said about appearances. "To investigate" in Sextus can mean "to investigate against", that is, it can refer to the process of putting thoughts and appearances in opposition to demonstrate the need for suspension, and such a meaning is suggested a little later in the text, where Sextus talks of "propounding arguments directly against appearances" (*PH* I 20).<sup>17</sup> "To investigate what is said about appearances" here presumably means simply "to investigate whether a thing is really such as it appears." Thus, a skeptic does not reject the fact that it appears to her that a ship has come, since this is not what she investigates; what she investigates is "what is said" about this, that is, the fact that a ship's coming in may serve as an indicative sign for the proposition that there is such a thing as motion or even that there is a ship coming. Again, as

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<sup>17</sup> See above, note 13.

in the previous case, the same holds for the appearance that may serve as an indicative sign for the proposition that motion does not exist, for example, for the appearance that Diodorean arguments against motion are valid. Therefore, we are again left without a criterion on the basis of which it may be said that what is evident has priority over philosophical arguments.

#### IV

I have argued that there are some problems concerning Sextus' phrase "to live in accordance with "everyday practice" without holding beliefs." On the one hand, we have seen that it is difficult to attach a distinct sense to "everyday practice" since it is not clear what are the independent criteria for demarcating everyday from non-everyday life, that is, criteria that do not already include a reference to a skeptical qualification. On the other hand, if the phrase is taken to stress the fact that a life without holding beliefs is an ordinary human life, then we are also left without a criterion of demarcation, since the skeptics withhold belief about every proposition, including everyday propositions, as is seen in Sextus' discussion of motion. In addition, this discussion has shown that everyday judgments—even *skeptical* everyday judgments, let alone everyday judgments as such—cannot have priority over doctrinal ones because of the manner in which they are formed or because they do not have ontological implications.

I believe, however, that the discussion of motion contains a clue as to how we can deal with these difficulties. It seems that what the skeptics oppose to philosophical arguments against motion in this discussion are not common sense judgments in the strict sense. It is true that the judgment that a ship has come or the judgment that Diogenes the Cynic is now walking can be taken in two ways: as implying that motion exists (this is how they are taken by those who use them as premises of the argument that motion exists) and as not having ontological implication (this is how they are used by the skeptics). There is, however, another distinction, that is, the one between these judgments taken as pieces of useful practical information (e.g., that my friend, who was on the ship, has come, or that Diogenes will soon no longer be here) and taken as constituents of a philosophical argument (e.g., that motion exists or that we should suspend judgment about whether motion exists). These distinctions do not necessarily coincide, for I can believe that Diogenes is

now walking without being aware that there is a philosophical argument about motion or without paying any attention to it. If one objects by saying that one cannot use the sentence "Diogenes is now walking" without assuming the existence, or at least the concept, of motion, the skeptic may retort that this is true, and that, in addition, there are arguments on the opposite side that there is no such thing as motion (or that motion is inconceivable), but that, if we use this sentence in order to say something useful to someone, then we are at the level of everyday life, which is characterized by paying no attention to philosophical arguments of any kind.<sup>18</sup>

After all, Sextus is not arguing by simply putting the judgment that a ship has come in opposition to the judgment that Diodorean argument is valid and *then* inferring suspension. He makes it very clear how these judgments are used: "*If motion does not exist*, then it is not possible for a ship to come from one port to another"—"*If motion exists*, then [Diodorean argument]."<sup>19</sup> It is only in such a use that the judgment that a ship has come can be a part of skeptical argument; likewise with Diogenes' argument. We may take it as a simple attempt of direct disproof ("Look, I am walking; hence I am moving; hence motion exists") or as a quasi-Moorean argument ("If motion does not exist, then now I am not walking; but I am now walking; therefore, motion exists").<sup>20</sup> In *such* a use, however, even though it *is* evident and such that induces passive acceptance, Diogenes' walking is *not* part of everyday life. In such a use, it is "far beyond the needs of ordinary life" (*PH* II 246).

Thus, Sextus would not be satisfied with the Moorean approach to the skeptical problem. He would object to the Mooreans that they use common sense judgments, like "I am now standing" or "This is hand," in the non-common sense way, so that he could not accept the Mooreans' claim that their argument is more credible than the traditional skeptics'. That is to say, he would insist that the Moorean approach could lead only to suspension of judgment about the existence of the external world. He would say that common sense beliefs, which are defended

<sup>18</sup> See *PH* II 244 and below, note 22.

<sup>19</sup> The similar form of argumentation is found in the discussion of place; see *PH* III 120: if place does not exist, then one cannot see right and left, up and down, in front and behind. See also III 17–19, on cause.

<sup>20</sup> See Moore (1959), 247.

by Reid, Moore, and others are just common sense *philosophical* beliefs, and that philosophy which is based on them is just philosophy, which is as dogmatic as traditional skepticism.<sup>21</sup> As soon as common sense judgments are removed from their normal practical use, they get the same status as doctrinal judgments, which have no other use than in philosophical arguments: they are futile as far as everyday human affairs are concerned.

A clear example of the difference between useful and useless, or genuine and counterfeit, common sense judgments is found in Sextus' discussion of sophisms (*PH* II 229–255). There are two basic kinds of sophisms: those which dialecticians are able to resolve but whose resolution is useless, and those whose resolution is useful, but which are not resolvable by dialecticians but by experts in the relevant domain. The first kind of sophisms seems to include a very broad range of arguments, presumably the whole of dogmatic philosophy, while the second class is restricted to sophisms within an art, for example, medicine. An example of a sophism of the first kind is Diodorus' argument against motion (*PH* II 242). There are two ways in which one can try to resolve it. First, one can try to construe a counterargument, a deductive proof with the conclusion that motion exists. Second, one can oppose to Diodorus' sophism an evident fact, like the fact that Diogenes is now walking or that ordinary people set out on journeys by land or by sea, etc. This does not mean, however, that in the latter case, where the sophism is refuted by the use of everyday judgments, its resolution becomes useful, or that the status of everyday judgments that are adduced in its refutation is different from the status of judgments that appear as premises in Diodorus' sophism. Both are pieces of philosophical reasoning which has as its outcome the suspension of judgment about whether motion exists.<sup>22</sup> The only

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<sup>21</sup> Hence, I agree with Burnyeat (1997b), 116: "... Sextus' dogmatist argues in a manner exactly like Moore: One thing is to the right, another to the left, therefore there are places; Plato is where Socrates was, so at least one place exists [cf. *AM* X 8, *PH* III 120]. Compare: Here is one hand, here is another, so at least two external things exist. Sextus complains that this is circular; he does not complain that it is the wrong *sort* of argument to establish the thesis that place exists." My point is just that there is another, genuine common sense use of these propositions. See also Brennan's remark: "It is only when the Dogmatists attempt to enlist *ὁ βίος* into their schemes that Sextus crafts arguments that seem to call *ὁ βίος* into question. And even in these cases, what they call into question is not *ὁ βίος* itself, but the particular role assigned to it by the Dogmatists in question" (Brennan 2000, 74).

<sup>22</sup> One might object that, strictly speaking, my distinction between genuine and



legitimate and undisputable use of common sense judgments is outside philosophy, in matters of everyday life. In its normal, practical use, they are irrefutable by philosophical argument, just as medical sophisms are irresolvable by dialecticians (*PH* II 237–240). Sextus mentions “a witty anecdote” about the doctor Herophilus:

[O]ne day Diodorus dislocated his shoulder and went to Herophilus to be treated. Herophilus wittily said to him: “Your shoulder was dislocated either in a place in which it was or in a place in which it wasn’t. But neither in which it was nor in which it wasn’t. Therefore it is not dislocated.” So the sophist begged him to leave such arguments alone and to apply the medical treatment suitable to his case. (*PH* II 245)

Diodorus could have used his own theory of motion to refute Herophilus and show that his shoulder *is* dislocated (even though it has never been in the process of dislocating: *AM* X 48, 86). On the other hand, we might imagine an advocate of common-sense philosophy refuting Herophilus by pointing to the evident fact, that is, Diodorus’ dislocated shoulder. In both cases, a Pyrrhonist would insist that we must suspend judgment whether Diogenes’ shoulder is dislocated (it is dislocated as far as Diodorus’ argument and evident fact are concerned, but it is not dislocated as far as Herophilus’ argument is concerned). In Sextus’ anecdote, however, Diodorus abandons any appeal to philosophy and asks Herophilus to leave philosophical arguments alone, and in such contexts, the questions of whether his shoulder is dislocated or whether there is such a thing as motion do not even arise. In such contexts, philosophical arguments, including skeptical arguments leading to suspension, are inapplicable and useless.

One might object to this by saying that even if we accept that the genuine everyday use of the proposition that the ship has come does not assume either the concept of motion or the affirmation of the existence of motion or the awareness of the possible use of this proposition in an argument about motion, it still presupposes that the proposition is *true*, for it is only under such a presupposition that I will go to the port to meet my friend whom I expected to come with the ship. If so, then this

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philosophical common sense judgments is not supported by the text, since what Sextus opposes to dialectical sophisms are common sense judgments in their normal, non-philosophical use (cf. *PH* II 244: “And ordinary men set out on journeys by land and by sea, and construct ships and houses, and produce children, *without paying any attention to the arguments against motion and coming into being*”). However, to put the quoted sentence in opposition to a philosophical argument *is* to use it in a doctrinal way.

proposition is by itself, as a constituent of everyday life, also a part of a possible philosophical dispute, say about whether there is such a thing as true proposition.

There are various skeptical strategies to meet this objection. The skeptics might argue, for instance, that to ascribe a property of being true to a proposition presupposes that the disputes about truth, the true, the truth-bearer, etc., are settled, and that, since this is not the case, we must suspend judgment as to whether we are justified in calling a proposition true or false. More to the point, they might argue that their demand that the disputes about truth etc. should be settled before we are justified in calling a proposition true is just as reasonable as the dogmatists' demand that a proposition should be accepted as true if it is to guide our action. Subsequently, they might add that the ordinary notion of truth is just as useful for everyday actions as the ordinary notion of motion, so that, even if the dispute about truth were settled, it would not be of much use. From the everyday point of view, all that is required to explain why I am going to the port are the facts that the ship has come and that I am expecting my friend.<sup>23</sup> Non-skeptics, both non-philosophers and philosophers alike, of course, do have various additional beliefs—that it is good, or that it is true, etc., that the ship has come—but Sextus' point is that they are simply redundant. That is to say, they are not necessary parts of the everyday, non-philosophical explanation of human action. To be sure, those additional beliefs are right there and constitute the web of beliefs of the ordinary person, and this is why ordinary life, as well as philosophical, is not exempt from skeptical scrutiny.

## V

Myles Burnyeat has argued that we cannot ascribe to ancient Pyrrhonists the idea of the insulation of skepticism from affecting the judgments of ordinary life. He summarizes his position as follows:

Every statement making a truth-claim falls within the scope of scientific investigation because, even if the statement itself is not at a theoretical level, it will still use concepts which are the subject of theoretical speculation: concepts such as motion, time, place, body. If these concepts are problematical, which Sextus argues they all are, and no line is drawn between

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<sup>23</sup> Provided, of course, that the term 'fact' is used loosely, and not in a philosophical sense.

philosophical and empirical doubt, the original statement will be equally problematical. You will have to suspend judgement about whether next year's sabbatical will come for you to work on philosophy of time—and also, of course, about whether it would matter if it did not.

(Burnyeat 1997b, 115)

I agree that, for the Pyrrhonists, every proposition that uses concepts that can be involved in undecidable dissent falls within the scope of suspension, and propositions that seem to belong to the domain of common sense are no exception. I also agree that there is no difference between philosophical and empirical doubt, provided that “empirical” is used in a usual philosophical sense, and not Sextus’ (who typically uses it as a synonym to βιωτικός). I have tried to show, however, that in Sextus, we can find at least traces of a further distinction, at a lower level, between genuine common sense propositions and those allegedly such, which are as problematic as highly abstract doctrinal propositions. Genuine common sense propositions are those that are immune to skeptical attack or to any kind of philosophical refutation, but not because they have some special epistemic feature, for example, because they are evident. The property of being evident is ascribed to them only after philosophical intervention in them, whether dogmatic or skeptical. Rather, they are immune to skeptical attack simply because they are useful for human life, as opposed to propositions that occur in philosophical arguments. Thus, genuine common sense propositions are those modeled on propositions made by experts in those arts, which are acceptable for the skeptics and which they do not try to overthrow precisely because they are advantageous for ordinary human life: medicine (as far as it is pursued in the acceptable, that is, Methodist, manner: *PH* I 236–241), grammar (considered just as an art of reading and writing, *AM* I 49), agriculture, navigation (*AM* V 1), music (considered just as an instrumental skill, for example, skill in playing flute, *AM* VI 1), etc.<sup>24</sup> And just as there is, in Sextus’ view, a clear-cut distinction between acceptable and unacceptable arts, there is a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable βίος.

<sup>24</sup> See Barnes (1988), 62–66. Even philosophy seems to be included in acceptable disciplines (see *AM* I 296: “[P]hilosophers and the rest of the prose-writers teach the things that are useful,” transl. Blank 1998), but the reasons for this are not quite clear. Sextus insists that his skepticism should be seen as a kind of philosophy (*PH* I 4, 5, 11, 236; II 6, 9; *AM* VII 30, VIII 191) and that philosophy of the dogmatists is not a genuine philosophy, but only a “so-called” philosophy (*PH* I 6, 18; II 1, 12, 205; III 1, 278). Presumably, he thinks that skepticism is the only useful kind of philosophy.

Thus, a skeptic will and will not suspend judgment about whether next year's sabbatical will come: she will, if she is discussing the philosophical problem of the reality of the future, and she will not, if she is writing an application for a research grant. This does not mean, however, that Sextus does, after all, have the notion of insulation, and that his skepticism does not affect the judgments of ordinary life.<sup>25</sup> For, in that case, there would be no need for a reform of ordinary life, or for the skeptical therapy. Sextus is well aware of the fact that everyday practice includes beliefs of various kinds. When he says that the skeptics do not lead their life according to philosophical theory, but according to "non-philosophical practice" (*AM* XI 165), he cannot restrict the life according to philosophical theory to life that is characteristic of philosophers and their circles, which are deeply influenced by philosophical doctrines. Life according to philosophical theory must also include lives of ordinary people who believe, for instance, that pain is bad (*AM* XI 159), or that it is in itself a good thing to get a research grant and take the next year's sabbatical. In this respect, Sextus' skepticism is not, and cannot be, insulated from ordinary life. It is insulated, however, as far as non-philosophical practice, or βίος, is concerned. Non-philosophical practice, of course, includes skeptical life, or activities, which are not accompanied by beliefs that things are objectively such and such. My point is just that it is not limited to skeptical life, in that it can be *described* independently of it. Or at least Sextus so believes. Hence, there is an independent sense of "everyday practice" in the phrase "to live in accordance with everyday practice without holding beliefs" at *PH* I 23. To explain an everyday phenomenon, for example, the fact that we are capable of thinking, it is sufficient to point to nature's guidance. To this, some (that is, the dogmatic philosophers) would add that we are capable of thinking also because we have a special faculty, called mind or intellect, which is well described in various philosophical theories. Others (the skeptics) would insist that we should suspend judgment as to whether there is such a faculty, and it is because of this, that they see themselves as being closer to everyday life than the dogmatists. The same applies to other items on the list, as well as to those that are missing. Thus, to explain, from the everyday point of view, why people cultivate courage, it is sufficient to point to the fact that this is the matter of traditional customs. To insist that it is (also) because people are

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<sup>25</sup> On the notion of insulation, see Bett (1993), esp. 370–381.

pursuing the good, and courage is a virtue, which is good, is to have a whole set of additional beliefs, which are all subject to skeptical scrutiny.

Thus, if the skeptics are indeed the advocates of everyday human life as it is independently of any philosophical interference, the only beliefs they have to eliminate are those in virtue of which genuinely common sense propositions become involved in philosophical disputes. That is to say, it is only “additional beliefs”<sup>26</sup> that are problematical for the skeptics, and ἄδοξάστως in Sextus’ account of skeptical way of life should best, I believe, be rendered “without having additional beliefs.”<sup>27</sup> The scope of these additional beliefs is, however, not very clear, for it is indeterminate what sorts of possible philosophical use of a proposition there are and in what ways they can be useful for ordinary human life. Hence, the account of everyday life given in this paper, by itself, does not resolve the Some Belief View–No Belief View dispute.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> On having additional beliefs (προσδοξάζειν), see *PH* I 30, III 236; *AM* XI 158, 166.

<sup>27</sup> The skeptics achieve tranquility or state without feelings (ἀπάθεια) ἐν τοῖς δοξαστοῖς, and moderation of feelings in matters forced upon them: their feeling, for example, of pain is moderate because they do not have the additional belief that pain is a bad thing (*PH* III 235–236; I 26, 30). Hence, to live without δοξαστά is to live without additional beliefs that things that are forced upon one have certain properties.

<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to Diego Machuca for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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## SEXTUS EMPIRICUS ON SKEPTICAL PIETY

Harald Thorsrud

With respect to the nature and existence of the gods, Sextus pursues his standard skeptical agenda: assembling equally powerful arguments both for and against, he is left with no inclination to believe either side. Nonetheless, in accordance with ordinary life, custom and law, the skeptic says that the gods exist and that they are provident. He performs all the appropriate religious rites in a reverential and pious spirit—and he does so without holding any beliefs (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* [PH] I 24, III 2; *Adversus Mathematicos* [AM] IX 49).

But why would the skeptic say that the gods exist if he does not believe they exist? And why would he bother to participate in religious ceremonies? One answer immediately suggests itself: the skeptic is insincere in his statements about the gods and in his pious observances. We might suppose he is admitting as much when he says that the skeptic's conformity with the traditional, accepted forms of worship will probably make him *safer* than other philosophers (AM IX 49).

In a forthcoming paper on Sextus' *Against the Physicists*, Richard Bett shows just how puzzling this claim is. As he points out, the skeptic's uncommitted stance is as unorthodox as the dogmatic philosopher's positive theological commitments. But if having unorthodox religious beliefs risks angering the gods or one's fellow citizens, then having no religious beliefs should run the same risk. On the other hand, if the point is that the skeptic is more secure in an epistemic or emotional sense, then it is surprising that Sextus does not say that he will be safer as a result of having suspended judgment, rather than as a result of participating in orthodox religious practice; for the skeptic's tranquility depends, in general, not on his behavior but rather the fact that he has suspended judgment.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, we need not resolve this puzzle in order to settle the question of the skeptic's sincerity, which is my primary concern here. However we understand the relative safety of the skeptic's religious stance, it

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<sup>1</sup> For epistemic uses of "safety" (*asphalês*), see AM VIII 473, 298, 300, 374. This term and its cognates often indicate political security in Epicurus' writings (Obbink 1996, 576).

is a further question whether and to what extent an appreciation of this safety is a motivating factor in his religious practice. If he is publicly pious *in order to be safe*, like the person who heaves himself into church after taking Pascal's wager, then he clearly is disingenuous and insincere.

Penelhum offers a particularly harsh version of this view, describing Sextus' attitude towards the gods as "halfhearted conformism," and Montaigne's Pyrrhonian piety as tepid and confused, the result of mistaking the fideist's reliance on skeptical argument as a means to clear away the obstacles with the positive goal of faith itself. Subsequent fideists, Penelhum (1983, 296–297) claims, saw more clearly "that if skeptic argument is to serve religious ends, it must issue not in belieflessness but in belief ..."<sup>2</sup> And we might add, it should issue in beliefs of the right sort, specifically those that attribute praiseworthy characteristics to the god(s).

The notion that belieflessness is inimical to religious ends serves as the major premise in what I will call the *insincerity objection*.

- 1) Having the relevant beliefs about the gods is a necessary condition for performing genuinely pious actions.
- 2) The skeptic has no beliefs about the gods.
- 3) Therefore the skeptic performs no genuinely pious actions.

The skeptic's insincerity follows directly:

- 4) If one is sincerely religious then he performs genuinely pious actions.
- 5) Hence, by (3) and (4), the skeptic is not sincerely religious.

The initial part of this argument may be seen as an instance of the more general *apraxia* objection.

- 1\*) Having the relevant beliefs about x is a necessary condition for performing intentional, skillful, or ethical action with regard to x.
- 2\*) The skeptic has no beliefs about x.
- 3\*) Therefore, the skeptic performs no intentional, skillful, or ethical action with regard to x.

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<sup>2</sup> Bailey (2002, 193) similarly accuses Sextus of dissimulation in taking part in religious practices without having the appropriate beliefs. Even Barnes, a staunch defender of the 'rustic' interpretation of Pyrrhonism (see note 3 below), finds Sextus' language at *PH* I 24 and III 2, if taken at face value, to be "misleading and perhaps disingenuous" (Barnes 1997, 85–86). And Bett (forthcoming) argues that Sextus does not provide a convincing, or consistent, account of the relation between the skeptic's religious practice and his skeptical arguments about the gods.



Two types of response have been made to the *apraxia* objection on behalf of the skeptic: we may either reject the second premise by arguing that the skeptic withholds judgment only on philosophical or theoretical matters, but has all sorts of ordinary beliefs, or we may reject the first premise by arguing that belief is not a necessary condition for the relevant sort of action.<sup>3</sup>

In a forthcoming paper, Julia Annas presents a powerful rejection of the second premise. Her argument rests on a distinction between religious and theological beliefs in ancient Greek polytheism. Theological belief attributes some property to the gods that is supposed to reveal the truth regarding unclear objects of investigation, it is supposed to be universally true, and based on rational considerations. Religious belief, by contrast, is none of these. It is not the product of any sort of investigation, but rather arises by virtue of membership and participation in a community with well-established religious practices. In the case of polytheistic Greek religion, such beliefs are not held to be universally true. Consequently, ordinary Greek polytheists do not see their religious beliefs as conflicting with other, apparently incompatible beliefs.

It is striking how open Greek polytheists were to incorporating foreign gods into their own religious worldviews, and how little concern they had for proselytizing or converting those with different religious beliefs. Annas accounts for this by claiming that Greek polytheistic religion was seen as “inter-comprehensible in a non-exclusive way.” In other words, competing and even apparently incompatible religious beliefs and practices could be translated in such a way as to make perfectly good sense of them without thereby offering some universal, cross-cultural account of the divine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For details on the long-standing dispute over what sorts of belief the skeptic suspends judgment on, see Thorsrud (2009, 173–182), Burnyeat and Frede (1997). Even though the issue of skeptical piety only deals with a small subset of the sort of beliefs a Pyrrhonist might have, a successful rejection of premise (2) would settle the larger issue about the scope of Pyrrhonism in favor of urbanity. It would be implausible to maintain that the only sort of ordinary belief a skeptic might have is about the gods. If ordinary religious belief is compatible with Pyrrhonian *epochê*, it is hard to see why ordinary ethical, political, or historical belief wouldn't be. On the other hand, a successful rejection of premise (1), which I undertake here, leaves open the issue of scope. Even if the skeptic lacks ordinary religious beliefs, he might still have other sorts of ordinary belief.

<sup>4</sup> Annas points out, in contrast, that their credal nature and reliance on sacred texts makes the three Western forms of monotheism essentially theological. Acceptance of one creed or the authority of one sacred text necessarily involves the rejection of

So one might have local religious beliefs without having, or even being logically committed to, any theological beliefs. If Sextus' arguments in *AM* IX and *PH* III target only the latter, then he aims to induce suspension of judgment only regarding reasoned accounts of cross-cultural, universal conceptions of the divine. Such a project allows the skeptic to hold ordinary Greek religious beliefs and to be pious in the way ordinary people are.

I will argue, however, that ordinary Greek religious belief does have theological implications, regardless of whether they are acknowledged, and regardless of whether religious belief is itself based on reason. By examining the content of such beliefs, as described both by Sextus and some roughly contemporaneous Greek writers, we may see that they qualify as the sort of dogma Sextus' skeptical practice is designed to eliminate. Having argued that we cannot plausibly reject premise (2), I then attempt to defend skeptical piety by rejecting premise (1)—the necessity of belief for piety. I claim that the skeptic can perform genuinely pious actions in accordance with religious impressions, or affective states, that fall short of belief.

### 1. *The Skeptic Has neither Ordinary nor Philosophical, Religious Convictions*

Sextus opens his discussion of physics in *PH* III by considering god as an active cause. He notes that it is against the rashness of the Dogmatists that he will present his case (*PH* III 2). Given the interminable debates about the nature of the divine, Sextus claims it is necessary to suspend judgment about whether the gods exist, so far as the Dogmatists are concerned (*PH* III 6). But we should not suppose that ordinary religious beliefs are henceforth off the table.

Throughout *PH* III, Sextus is primarily interested in undermining the rational force of philosophical views on the central topics of the physics of his day: e.g., causation, matter, motion, change, and time. Revealing the failures of the physicists' best attempts to make sense of body, for example, he nudges us towards the conclusion that body is

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other, incompatible creeds or sacred authorities—but see Sihvola (2006), esp. 97–98. Consequently, a Pyrrhonian skeptic who claimed to be one of these sorts of monotheists would necessarily be insincere.

unreal. But to counterbalance this impression, Sextus appeals to the everyday observation that bodies appear to be real (*PH* III 49). Ordinary life is not offered as a more plausible alternative, or as a correction, but rather as a counterweight to the surprising impression we are left with from the refutation of the Dogmatists. Similarly, in his discussion of motion, Sextus remarks that “so far as appearance [and ordinary life, *ho bios*] goes there seems to be motion, so far as [Parmenides’ and Melissus’] philosophical argument goes it is unreal” (*PH* III 65). In these examples, Sextus leads us to feel that there no more is than is not such a thing as body or motion. He does not encourage us to reject abstruse theorizing in favor of ordinary observation and belief.

This willingness to lump ordinary people together with philosophers is also evident when Sextus presents a familiar dilemma for anyone (presumably anyone other than the skeptic) who says that the gods exist and are provident (*PH* III 9). Either the gods provide for all or only for some. It is not in keeping with the conception of the gods as powerful and benevolent that they should provide only for some. But the existence of evil strongly suggests that they do not provide for all. So, either the gods are willing but unable to provide for all, or they are able but not willing. In the first case, the gods are unacceptably weak and in the second they are unacceptably malicious. Therefore, Sextus concludes,

those who firmly state there are gods are no doubt bound to be impious: if they say that the gods provide for everything, they will say that they are a cause of evil; and if they say that they provide for some or even for none at all, they will be bound to say either that the gods are malign or that they are weak—and anyone who says this is clearly impious.<sup>5</sup> (*PH* III 12)

Sextus is being intentionally provocative by claiming that a firm belief in the existence of the gods leads to impiety. The point is that one who believes in divine providence cannot consistently maintain his conception of the gods. Lacking a conclusive resolution of the problem of evil, he may be driven to accept one of two beliefs, the implications of which, he himself would consider impious. Short of that, he may simply end up with some false, or at least unjustified, belief about the gods which itself might be impious.

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<sup>5</sup> All translations of *PH* are from Annas and Barnes (2000).

Of course there are plenty of proposed resolutions. The Stoics argue that the gods provide for everything, but are never the cause of any evil—we humans are to blame for that. But there are powerful objections to this response. For example, we may call into question the coherence of the relevant sense of human freedom, and its relation to divine power. The Stoic will then have to disarm the objections, generate new arguments, or finally acknowledge that the reasons for and against are equally strong. And so it goes: philosophers develop increasingly sophisticated versions of traditional theodicies, which are then subjected to increasingly sophisticated objections.

The Epicureans, on the other hand, have no need of theodicy since they argue that the gods' indifference towards us is a sign neither of malice nor weakness. Discovering that this is so is instrumental in promoting Epicurean tranquility. It relieves us of any anxiety about divine wrath while also articulating an ideal we should all aim at.<sup>6</sup> From the skeptical standpoint, however, such therapy can be at best temporarily effective. The Dogmatists' competing conceptions of the divine, along with direct skeptical challenges, should eventually undermine Epicurean conviction.<sup>7</sup>

Such persistent disputes are disturbing, especially if one is convinced that his wellbeing depends on resolving them (see *PH* I 12, 26). If my happiness, along with the security of my family or larger political community, depends on having true beliefs about the gods and providence, what should I believe? The stakes are even higher if we also suppose that having false beliefs about the gods is itself impious.

But perhaps these disturbances arise only for the philosophically minded who are moved to respond to the skeptic's challenge. We can easily imagine an ordinary person whose religious convictions are never challenged, and is not even aware that there *are* philosophical disputes regarding the gods. More interestingly, we may imagine a person who is relatively immune to such challenges. If his religious beliefs are so foundational as to serve as the cognitive 'lens' through which he sees the world, he may not even feel the need to provide rational evidence in

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent brief account of Epicurean theology, see O'Keefe (2010), 155–162.

<sup>7</sup> Even if all of the dogmatists agree that the gods are imperishable and blessed (whatever that might mean) there is no consensus as to whether the gods are corporeal or incorporeal, anthropomorphic or not, located in space and in the universe or not (*PH* III 3–4).

support. Indeed, it would seem odd to seek proof of what is so strikingly evident. Lacking rational grounds for his religious beliefs, this person will find skeptical challenges irrelevant.<sup>8</sup>

But even if he is unwilling or unable to consider the possibility that the gods do not exist or that they are not provident, he will inevitably have to confront the appearance of innocent suffering and injustice. The fact that one perceives the world as an ultimately just place will not eliminate the very appearance of injustice, even if it provides an easy re-evaluation of such appearances. Furthermore, since prayer, sacrifice and ritual cleansing do not always produce the desired results, theists who hold that the gods are provident face a recurrent challenge: they must either reaffirm their trust in the efficacy of religious observance despite its failures or give up those convictions.<sup>9</sup> None of this requires skeptical intervention. Ordinary experience of the world is sufficient. In fact Sextus mentions such a case:

Diagoras of Melos, the dithyrambic poet, was at first, they say, god-fearing (*deisidaimôn*) above all others ... but when he had been wronged by a man who had sworn falsely and suffered no punishment for it, he changed round and asserted that god does not exist. (AM IX 53)

Diagoras experienced what Sextus refers to as an anomaly: he could not believe both that god is provident and powerful and that the injustice he suffered would go unpunished. Unlike the skeptic, Diagoras resolves the anomaly by accepting one belief and rejecting the other.

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<sup>8</sup> Wolterstorff, Plantinga and others have developed versions of Reformed Epistemology according to which religious experience grounds belief insofar as it is the cause of that belief—see, for example, Plantinga and Wolterstorff (1983). As long as the believer has some plausible, though not necessarily conclusive, response to known objections, his religious belief is not contrary to reason, though it is not justified on the basis of reasons. I take some inspiration from Reformed Epistemology in the next section when I argue that the skeptic's piety is sincere insofar as it arises from religious experience—the crucial difference is that the skeptic's religious experience does not cause him to have any beliefs. Knuutilla and Sihvola (2000, 139) find an important similarity between Sextus' view and Wittgensteinian fideism: religion is autonomous insofar as it “needs no justification from outside, and cannot be justified by the means of dogmatic philosophy.” However, as they convincingly point out that unlike the Wittgensteinian the skeptic is not aiming to preserve the justificatory practices of autonomous forms of discourse.

<sup>9</sup> The Reformed Epistemologist might at this point claim that despite any number of failed predictions about divine intervention, there are reasons why God fails to act when we expect that He will, or should. Be that as it may, if this is the direction the ordinary religious believer takes, it is a decisive step towards theology and away from a merely uncritical acceptance of norms. See also Sihvola (2006).

What makes the anomaly about divine justice possible, if not inevitable in this case, is the fact that ordinary religious belief (in marked distinction from the Epicurean view) is supposed to be the basis for true explanations and predictions regarding divine intervention in the natural, causal order of things. Whether or not it is supported by rational considerations, ordinary religious beliefs refer to an objective, shared reality in which the gods are able to intervene and make a difference in the way things go.

To illustrate this point, I offer a few historical examples from Greek authors roughly contemporaneous with Sextus.

Inscribed on pillars inside a temple of Asklepios in Corinth were the names of people healed by the god, along with descriptions of the diseases and how they were healed (Paus. II 27.3, Jones 1936). The suppliants slept in the temple and were often informed by the god in their dreams of the necessary curative measures. For relatively minor ailments, the god's advice was little more than commonsense—e.g. restricted diet, fresh air, exercise, and bathing. But there are also miraculous cures recorded (Walton 1979, 59–60). The credulous Pausanias reports that Asklepios restored the sight to a blind man by presenting a sealed tablet to a woman with orders to deliver it to him. Opening the tablet, he was suddenly able to see, and gratefully obeying what the god had written, he gave the woman two thousand gold staters for the founding of a temple to Asklepios (Paus. X 38.13). Such stories along with the inscriptions at Corinth testify to an uncritical acceptance of the healing events as confirmation of the god's power.

Pausanias has no interest in appealing to placebo effects, or more generally, in providing a naturalistic account of these events. And he has no truck with metaphorical interpretations of divine agency. He reports, for example, that a man suddenly died after encountering the goddess Isis, thereby confirming Homer's (*Il.* 20.131) remark that "it is ill for mankind to see the gods in bodily shape" (Paus. X 32.13–18). Even more striking is his conviction that in the "good old days" men of excellent character were sometimes transformed into gods, but because of the wickedness of those alive today this no longer happens (Paus. VIII 2.3–7).

An even greater credulity is apparent in the hypochondriac ravings of Aelius Aristides, who, in his *Sacred Tales* charts the history of his malaise and various stages of cure at the divine hand of Asklepios.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Behr's (1968) commentary for a more sympathetic treatment.

Aristides' unquestioning faith in the benevolent power of Asklepios is nicely summed up in this passage:

Whenever the God prescribed and clearly stated them [cures], the same regimen and the same actions brought to my body and to my spirit salvation, strength, comfort, ease, high spirits, and every good thing. But when some other person advised me and missed the intention of the God, they brought everything opposite to this. How is this not the greatest sign of the God's power?  
(*Sacred Tales* II.73, Behr 1968, 238)

How indeed? The same reasoning can be used to justify any other sort of occult power: the mentalist's failure to read our minds is always the result of some interference, and never the result of impotence. There is no possible evidence that could convince Aristides that Asklepios is unreliable, malicious, or non-existent, and yet like Pausanias, he is convinced the god is an effective causal agent acting in the world.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, just as some ordinary believers wholeheartedly accepted the reality of Asklepios' power, some practitioners of Hippocratic medicine considered the priests of Asklepios to be quacks (Zaidman & Patel 1992, 131). And Lucian devotes an entire work to debunking the scandalous frauds of Alexander, the false prophet of Asklepios.

The most entertaining of Alexander's scams is his introduction of the god, reborn in the form of a serpent, an essential Asklepiian symbol. One night he concealed a newborn snake inside a goose egg that had been blown out and placed it near the foundation of a temple that had been recently excavated. The next morning he ran through the market place in a religious frenzy, singing his praises of Asklepios and Apollo at the top of his lungs. He attracted a great crowd to witness his "discovery" of the egg and the revelation of "the god." Several days later, he affixed to a full-grown snake a linen head that looked very human and began to show the "god" to the awe struck public, who were eager to pay the steep price for the snake-god's oracles (*Alexander the False Prophet* 13–27).

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<sup>11</sup> Ptolemy offers a similar defense of astrological prediction in his *Tetrabiblos*: every failure can readily be explained in terms of intervening causal factors. So, for example, we may explain why two people born at the same time and place, with the same astrological charts, live different lives, by appealing to some causal factors other than the relative positions of the stars and planets. Astrological predictions always come true ... except when they don't. See Long (1982).

As he wished to astonish the crowd still more, he promised to produce the god talking—delivering oracles in person without a prophet. It was no difficult matter for him to fasten cranes' windpipes together and pass them through the head, which he had so fashioned as to be lifelike. Then he answered the questions through someone else who spoke into the tube from the outside, so that the voice issued from his canvas Asklepios.

(*Alexander* 26, Harmon 1925)

Alexander also had a method for correcting his, or rather the god's, erroneous predictions. He achieved infallibility by simply expunging the mistaken oracles after the fact and revising them appropriately (*Alexander* 27).

Asklepios is undoubtedly a central figure in Greek religion. He appears to have deep roots as an earth spirit in the prehistory of the Greek cults. Homer mentions him on several occasions, as do Hesiod and Pindar. Although these poets do not consider him a god, his divine status is widely acknowledged by the second century AD.<sup>12</sup> The antiquity of Asklepios along with the complex, interrelated development, transplants and appropriations of local Greek religions, goes some way in explaining the rich variety of sanctuaries and rituals devoted to the god by the second century AD (see Paus. II 26–29). This diversity, however, does not in the least detract from the point I have been emphasizing: both affirmations and denials of ordinary religious belief include reference to the gods as effective causal agents, and this fact renders such belief dogmatic by Sextus' standards.

Causal efficacy cuts across differences of culture and language, at least as far as the skeptic is concerned. For in order for even relativized beliefs about piety to be true, we must suppose that the gods who are honored by such observances really exist. So even if we are inclined to think that religious observances should only be assessed relative to conventional norms—that human sacrifice is really pious for the Tauri, but not for us<sup>13</sup>—we should not find it plausible to maintain that for some people

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<sup>12</sup> Walton (1979, 30) notes that, "The tendency of the Athenian cult was to localize Asklepios, while the very opposite course was followed in other parts of Greece. Here he was associated with heroes rather than with the higher gods, while in Epidauros and elsewhere he is worshipped with Zeus, Apollo, Artemis and so on."

<sup>13</sup> It may well have been the case that Sextus' predecessor, Aenesidemus, aimed his skeptical attack exclusively at claims about the invariable nature of things, but was not concerned with properly relativized beliefs (see Woodruff 1988, opposed by Schofield 2007). Whether or not we accept the view that Bett (1997) attributes to Sextus in *AM*



only one god exists, for others many gods exist, and for still others no gods exist. Sextus points to this very anomaly: "among ordinary people, some say that there is one god, others that there are many and of different forms" (*PH* III 219). But they cannot both be right: if there are many gods, there is not only one. Even if there is some convincing resolution of the dispute between monotheists and polytheists, say in some form of henotheism, the dispute between theists and atheists remains. And even more to the point, Asklepios might very well ignore your pleas, but if he exists for me in the ordinary sense of the term, he clearly exists for you as well. Since we should be reluctant to import any philosophical or ethereal sense of existence to ordinary religious belief, it seems we must accept this important limitation on relativizing strategies. So: ordinary religious beliefs presuppose the causal efficacy of the god(s), and causal efficacy presupposes the existence of the god(s); while normative claims regarding what is pious or morally good can be plausibly relativized, existential claims cannot, at least as they are ordinarily understood.

What's more, Sextus is well aware that the existence of the gods is the fundamental issue. He opposes the views of both ordinary and philosophical theists to the views of atheists (*AM* IX 50–51). Having developed equally powerful considerations on both sides, the skeptic declares that the gods are no more existent than non-existent (*AM* IX 59). Here again, ordinary beliefs are included in the philosophical dispute and not offered as a suitable alternative or corrective to misguided dogmatism.<sup>14</sup> The skeptic's assertion that the gods are no more existent than non-existent is clearly incompatible with ordinary religious belief. And it appears to require the skeptic to suspend judgment on the causal efficacy of the gods as well as the very existence of piety (cf. *AM* IX 123–125), even relativized to a particular time and place.

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XI, namely the negatively dogmatic claim that nothing *is* by nature good or bad, Sextus' arguments against the ethicists in *PH* clearly aim at suspension of judgment regarding such claims. The question that is relevant for our concerns is whether Sextus' aim in *PH* is exclusively the elimination of beliefs about the invariable nature of the gods, or whether it includes the elimination of relativized and ordinary beliefs about the gods as well.

<sup>14</sup> See also Sextus' description of the first of Agrippa's five modes: "undecidable dissension occurs both in ordinary life and among philosophers" (*PH* I 165). Insofar as ordinary beliefs figure into apparently interminable disputes, the skeptic will suspend judgment regarding them.

There is further, and I think decisive, evidence that Sextus targets ordinary religious belief for elimination in his concluding remarks about the gods in *AM IX*.

As a result of these [arguments], the skeptic's suspension of judgment is introduced, especially since they are supplemented by the divergence of the views of ordinary folk about the gods. For different people have different and discordant notions about them, so that neither are all of these notions to be trusted because of their inconsistency, nor some of them because of their equipollence; and this is further confirmed by the mythologizing of the theologians and the poets; for it is full of all kinds of impiety.

(*AM IX* 191–192)

The variety of incompatible religious beliefs, whether ordinary, poetic, or philosophical, is grist to the skeptic's mill because they all claim to reveal the truth of matters that are not evidently so to everyone. Insofar as they conflict with one another they cannot all be true; but neither is any one of them more convincing than the others (see *AM IX* 29). The kind of dispute that would have taken place between Lucian and Aristides, had they met, is not unusual; nor is it likely to have escaped the skeptic's notice. Such a difference of opinion appears to be an excellent instance of "the divergence of the views of ordinary folk about the gods."<sup>15</sup>

A puzzling aspect of this concluding remark is the further confirmation offered by the allegedly impious pronouncements of the poets. Apparently the impiety of the poets is offered as a reason for not accepting their portrayal of the gods as engaged in lascivious and immoral acts. But we should not take that as an endorsement of the opposed belief. A Platonist, for example, would firmly assert that the gods are incapable of immoral behavior, and consequently that the poets are guilty of ignorance, if not slander. But Sextus' customary reverence of the gods is based on no dogma, Platonic or otherwise. Making firm assertions about the nature of the gods presupposes some sort of standard or criterion that exceeds what is necessary for ordinary life in all of its behavioral expressions, political, moral, religious, etc. So perhaps the poets' impiety is really more a matter of how they say things about the gods rather than

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<sup>15</sup> The skeptic would side with Lucian's rational debunking of religious fraud only insofar as it undermines conviction, but not to the extent of replacing, reforming or improving such popular convictions. At *AM VI* 19, for example, Sextus promotes the Epicurean view that "a clap of thunder . . . does not betoken the epiphany of a god, though supposed to do so by ignorant and superstitious folk." But he does not endorse the positive Epicurean view that the gods are blissfully indifferent to us mortal humans.

what they say. Firm assertions lead us all, whether Platonist, tragic poet, or ordinary person, to untenable positions regarding the gods. The skeptic steers clear of all such assertions and the convictions underlying them.

## 2. *Piety without Belief*

Having shown that it is not plausible to reject premise (2) of the insincerity objection, I turn to the case for rejecting premise (1). A strong intuition motivating this premise is that a non-believing religious practitioner must be either intentionally or unintentionally deceptive in his religious practice. Intentional deception is relatively easy to dismiss. Suppose that one has carefully considered the arguments for and against the morality of eating meat and as a result has suspended judgment. Since he neither believes that it is morally acceptable nor that it is morally unacceptable, it would make no sense to accuse him of hypocrisy for eating meat. Such a charge could stick only if, contrary to our assumption, he had arrived at the conclusion that eating meat is immoral.

A paradigm case of intentional deception arises when one publicly condemns carnivores, firmly asserting that they are immoral, and then secretly gorges on hamburgers without the remorse that characterizes weakness of will. Being disingenuous necessarily involves the intention to deceive others with respect to one's beliefs or actions. Similarly, the atheist who takes part in religious rituals unavoidably gives others a false view of himself.<sup>16</sup> In the best-case scenario, we may suppose that he wishes to deceive intolerant religious believers in order to avoid persecution. But even if such deception is justified, his religious observances are still insincere.<sup>17</sup>

The reverent skeptic, by contrast, is not trying to convince his fellow-worshippers that he believes as they do. If in fact he has no beliefs about the gods, he has no beliefs that can be contradicted by his actions, and he has nothing to hide; so he can have no intent to deceive.<sup>18</sup> The crucial

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<sup>16</sup> A different sort of atheist might adopt a reverential attitude towards godless nature, and sincerely express this reverence, but he would not thereby be acting as if god exists.

<sup>17</sup> For a similar accusation leveled against Epicureans taking part in traditional religious rituals, see Plutarch, *Contra Epic. Beat.* 1102B.

<sup>18</sup> The character Chauncey Gardiner, from Kosinski's *Being There*, is an excellent illustration of this.

point is that the skeptic is not pretending to *be* an ordinary religious believer by virtue of engaging in the customary forms of worship. When Sextus says the skeptic follows, or acts in accordance with, ordinary life, we need not take him to mean that the skeptic differs in no significant ways from the ordinary person when engaging in these activities.

Still, we might think there is a reasonable presumption that those engaging in shared religious practices also share the relevant beliefs. This is merely to reaffirm premise (1) of the insincerity objection—belief is a necessary condition for performing pious action. If so, the pious skeptic is merely going through the motions and is at best unintentionally deceptive. He may not mean to mislead his fellow worshippers, but this will be the outcome. Furthermore, since it is hard to imagine that he would not realize this, he would be at least partially responsible for their mistake. If the skeptic is aware that those around him will assume he believes as they do, and that they would consider his participation insincere unless accompanied by those beliefs, the skeptic's religious behavior is objectionable, as is his willingness to *say* that providential gods exist.

On the other hand, we must be cautious about projecting our contemporary views regarding piety. It is widely acknowledged, as Betegh puts it, that

*Eusebia*, commendable religious attitude, consisted not in fidelity to a code of belief but in the correct performance of ritual obligations and regularly honoring the gods with generous, though not excessive, offerings.<sup>19</sup>  
(Betegh 2006, 627)

It was this lack of dogmatic constraint on religious practice that opened the door to philosophical innovation. Platonists, Aristotelians, Epicureans and Stoics could all act in accordance with local religious tradition while offering their innovations,

not as a rupture with traditional religiosity or a devastating attack from the outside, but as internal reforms grounded on a genuine understanding of the nature of the divine. (Betegh 2006, 626; cf. Mansfeld 1999, 478)

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<sup>19</sup> However, we should also be cautious not to reduce Greek piety entirely to enthusiastic participation in ritual. According to Zaidman and Patel (1992, 14–15), to be pious was “to believe in the efficacy of the symbolic system that the city had established for the purpose of managing relations between gods and men, and to participate in it, moreover, in the most vigorously active manner possible.”

The skeptic's piety may similarly be seen as compatible with, or even more strongly, in accordance with, traditional religious practice. The crucial difference is that the skeptic is not proposing any sort of internal reform. Indeed, the skeptic is not proposing anything at all. The implicit challenge of skeptical religious practice is the notion that we need no convictions about the gods, let alone more rationally justifiable convictions, in order to sincerely worship them.

What accounts for the lingering sense that the skeptic's pious observations are insincere is the assumption that he lacks the internal affective states associated with religious practice. This, in turn, rests on the assumption that one cannot have the proper affective states if one lacks the relevant beliefs. To reject this I will argue that the skeptic may experience the sort of affective states necessary for sincerely pious action in the absence of belief.

Although Sextus says surprisingly little about his own time and place, he occasionally refers to what is customary "for us." In some of these cases we find an action or custom is both impious and illegal: "among most of us it is unlawful to defile the altar of a god with human blood . . . [and] we think that holy places are polluted by the killing of a human being" (*PH* III 208; see III 221, I 149). Furthermore, "some people actually eat human flesh as a matter of indifference, something which among us has been deemed unholy" (III 225) and unlawful (III 207).

There is no good reason to suppose that Sextus excludes himself when he says "we think" and "it has been deemed by us." Guiding his actions in accordance with customs and laws is a matter of acting in accordance with how things appear as well as conforming to what is customarily done. By the same token, the skeptic does not eat and drink simply because he sees others eating and drinking, but also because he is hungry and thirsty, and eating and drinking seem good. The mere fact that he eats and drinks is explained by the second of the four-fold observances, necessitation by feelings. But *what* the skeptic eats and drinks, or refuses to eat and drink, is explained by what he finds pleasant along with the third observance, guidance by law and custom.

It is of course possible that what seems good to the skeptic is contrary to the customs and laws.<sup>20</sup> It might seem to him, for example, that the

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<sup>20</sup> If there are laws and customs that generate anxiety and mental disturbance, it is at least possible that the skeptic's drive towards tranquility would make it appear to him that

gods demand human sacrifice. But such an impression would have to come from somewhere. If human sacrifice is deemed impious by the established religious traditions, the contrary impression would have to have a foreign origin. Insofar as the skeptic's evaluative impressions are the product of habituation or enculturation, they will not be contrary to the established traditions of his community. So we may suppose that, for the most part, when the skeptic abides by his city's laws and customs, it is because it seems good to do so. There may certainly be cases in which something seems good that is contrary to what the laws and customs demand—but this will be the exception and not the rule.

Accordingly, we may suppose that spilling human blood at sacred places and eating human flesh seem bad to Sextus. Likewise, the reason the skeptic says that the gods are provident is that they seem to be provident. He will revere the gods as good and unaffected by evil not simply because he sees others doing so, but also because it seems to him that the gods are to be revered as good and unaffected by evil. It may even appear to him that by engaging in religious practices he is doing his part to preserve the proper relation between gods and men—a recurrent theme in ancient Greek religion.

In order to further explore this, we will consider two of the skeptic's religious 'impressions': the appearance that it is impious to eat human flesh, and the appearance that the gods are provident. In one respect these are no different from other evaluative impressions, e.g. tattooing babies appears shameful, and piracy appears unjust (*PH* III 202, 214, respectively). Being habituated to his community's norms, the skeptic will immediately reject such things. He doesn't need to reflect on any rational considerations that are supposed to establish the injustice of piracy or the impiety of cannibalism—he will simply see it that way. (In this respect, the skeptic's religious impressions are similar to the properly basic beliefs of Reformed Epistemology.)

But whereas the theist feels no need to support what he takes to be more evidently true by what is less evidently true, the skeptic feels no need to support what he does not take to be true in the first place. More precisely, the skeptic does not take his impressions, whether perceptual or evaluative, to reveal the way the world is.

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living in accordance with such laws and customs is bad. It is perhaps not coincidental that the gods appear provident to Sextus and not malicious (see *PH* I 29–30).

When we investigate whether existing things are such as they appear, we grant that they appear [for no one disputes whether things appear as they do, but whether they are as they appear, *PH* I 22], and what we investigate is not what is apparent but what is said about what is apparent—and this is different from investigating what is apparent itself.

(*PH* I 19–20; see *PH* II 10, I 13, 193)

This is clearest in the perceptual case: honey appears (i.e. tastes) sweet. Such impressions are not objects of investigation—Sextus thinks no one would seriously question whether honey *seems* sweet when it does. The skeptic merely acknowledges his awareness of the sensation, revealing only how he takes himself to be affected at that moment. Understood this way, such impressions cannot be opposed to one another. If honey appears sweet to him in the evening and bitter in the morning, then he will admit that it appears now sweet and now bitter. He will feel no need to choose one impression over the other as he does not take these shifting impressions to make competing claims about reality.

So too the skeptic's impression that cannibalism is impious is merely a report of how he is passively affected by the thought of cannibalism. He does not take the impression to be true or even convincing. But he will acquiesce in the feeling of revulsion and act accordingly. As in the case of honey, the skeptic will not question whether cannibalism appears impious, but whether in fact it is. He will consider Chrysippus' arguments that there are occasions when eating human flesh, even one's own, is the right thing to do (*AM* XI 192–194, *PH* III 247). And he will oppose this view with arguments establishing the impiety of cannibalism. But even after suspending judgment on this issue it may continue to appear that cannibalism is impious, even though the appearance will move the skeptic less violently than one who believes it is impious by nature (cf. *PH* I 29–30, III 235–236).

To the extent that the appearance of impiety is not contingent on rational considerations, the investigation of arguments pro and con should have no effect (unless the skeptic is uncharacteristically unable to achieve the standstill of reason by providing equally strong arguments on each side of the issue).<sup>21</sup> In this way the skeptic may consistently feel no

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<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere I argue for a dispositional interpretation of such passages as *PH* I 34 in which Sextus discusses what the skeptic will do when he is not able, at the moment, to provide an equally strong counterargument to the one proposed (Thorsrud 2009, 132–134, 187–188). On this view, the current imbalance does not incline the skeptic to

*rational* inclination to affirm either the piety or impiety of cannibalism while experiencing revulsion at the thought of it. Even though he no longer has a disposition to affirm or deny any proposition that supposedly reveals the truth about the gods, his disposition to feel attraction or repulsion to some proposed course of action remains. The affective state of revulsion at the thought of eating human flesh is not dependent on any particular beliefs about the gods, though perhaps some such beliefs were initially necessary in the process of habituation.

The situation is similar to the skeptic's attitude towards motion: he will not question whether things appear to move, but whether as a matter of fact, in reality, they do (*PH* III 63–81, *AM* X 37–168). As we have seen, Sextus appeals to the commonsensical view of the ordinary person that motion is real: “so far as the appearances go there seems to be motion” (*PH* III 65, *AM* X 45). But as far as philosophical argument goes, motion is unreal. Objects probably appear to move in much the same way to ordinary people as they do to skeptics, and for that matter as they do to philosophers, whether or not they deny the reality of motion. The crucial difference is the additional significance the impression is supposed to have. The ordinary person (sometimes) takes the appearance of motion as a reason to believe in the reality of motion, and some philosophers take it as an illusion to be explained away. The skeptic, by contrast, does not take the impression of motion as evidence of anything. Like everyone else, he will act in accordance with how things seem—he will move out of the way of speeding chariots and reach out his hand to catch something thrown to him. But none of these ordinary reactions require him to take the appearance of motion as signifying anything. Suspending judgment regarding the reality of motion does not interfere with the appearance that things move, nor does it impede the skeptic's ability to act accordingly.

Analogous claims can be made for the impression that the gods are provident.<sup>22</sup> Divine providence probably appears much the same to ordi-

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assent, even modestly, since he has a stronger inclination to suspend judgment based on his past skeptical practice, which has always enabled him to discover the necessary counterargument in the end.

<sup>22</sup> Bett (forthcoming) briefly raises and rejects this interpretation for two reasons: first it would make Sextus' claim to follow ordinary life in religious matters disingenuous, since ordinary people have definite beliefs about the gods. But I have argued above that we should not take Sextus to mean that the skeptic *is* an ordinary religious believer, i.e. that he differs in no significant way. Second, Bett claims that Sextus generally avoids making any remarks about how matters contested by dogmatists even appear to him—for example,



nary religious believers as it does to the reverent skeptic. In the right circumstances, this impression will induce the relevant affective states of admiration, fear, reverence, wonder, etc. And it will trigger the inclination to give the gods their due by engaging in the appropriate rituals. The difference is again the additional significance that is sometimes attached to the impression of divine providence. Unlike both the ordinary religious believer and the philosophical theist, the skeptic will feel no inclination to reason either to or from this impression. I.e. he will neither take it as a premise, or any sort of evidence, from which to draw a conclusion, nor as something to be accounted for or explained by rational means.

It may be the case that the gods appear to the skeptic at one time provident and at another time malicious. But again that would pose no particular problem since he does not experience these impressions in competition with one another. Having no such contradictions to resolve is in fact an essential component of the skeptic's tranquility. For the ordinary religious believer, by contrast, there is an ever-present possibility of confronting the troubling contradiction between the impression that the gods are powerful and provident, and the impression that injustice exists.

The skeptic's indifference to whether his impressions cohere may seem scandalous or at least epistemically irresponsible. But the Pyrrhonist does not accept the obligation that philosophers typically take for granted, namely, to arrive at a more coherent, and hence more rationally defensible view of reality. On the other hand, if firm assertion and dogmatic belief about the gods interfere with, or detract from, one's reverent affective states, i.e. if firm belief about the gods leads us unwittingly to impiety, then contrary to Penelhum's assessment, skeptical argument could indeed serve religious ends. By eliminating both ordinary and

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he does not say there is (i.e. appears to be) a criterion of truth or there are (i.e. appear to be) causes; rather, he avoids saying anything. So if we take Sextus' assertions about the gods as I have, as remarks about how things appear to the skeptic, it would be a striking departure from his normal pattern. I disagree about the pattern. Having the appropriate impressions about the gods is as essential to communal life for ancient Greeks as having the appropriate impression about what is morally good and bad. Just as these impressions enable one to navigate through the social world, impressions about motion enable one to navigate through the physical world. People are habituated, by their interactions with the social and physical worlds to see things these ways—the resulting impressions are thus not founded on reasons, and may remain untouched by the skeptical practice of balancing opposed arguments. By contrast, having impressions about criteria of truth or causes (*qua* causes, i.e. in the philosophical sense of the term), is utterly unnecessary for the practical purposes of day-to-day life.

philosophical religious belief, the skeptic may be seen as clearing the impediments to genuinely reverent affective states, rather than clearing the way for their dogmatic attendants.

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## SEXTUS EMPIRICUS' STYLE OF WRITING

Stéphane Marchand

### 1. Introduction

It is an oft-repeated criticism that skeptical philosophers should not even speak if they do not know anything. How, *a fortiori*, could they write anything? And would they venture to write or speak if they indeed suspend their judgment about whether anything can be known or taught?<sup>1</sup> It is possible that Pyrrho was in such a depressing position, for his promotion of ἀφασία as one of the goals of philosophy should lead him to the renunciation of describing things as they are.<sup>2</sup> It seems, in fact, that Pyrrho “led a life consistent with this doctrine,” as Antigonos of Carystus maintained (*apud* DL IX 62; Hick’s translation), since he did not write anything, at least in the field of philosophy.<sup>3</sup> The numerous anecdotes about his life transmitted by Diogenes, even if they are largely fictitious, lead us to suspect that he had a strange relationship with language.<sup>4</sup>

However, considering the output of two philosophers who—at different times and in different ways—claimed to follow Pyrrho’s philosophy and way of life, Timon of Phlius and Sextus Empiricus, the renunciation of writing seems not to be essential to Pyrrhonism.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH) III 253–272, *Adversus Mathematicos* (AM) XI 232–233, and AM I 31–38 for the Pyrrhonist’s arguments against teaching. This question has also been asked by Sluiter (2000), 113.

<sup>2</sup> For this position, see Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* (PE) XIV 18, 1–4 (T. 53 Decleva Caizzi 1981b, hereafter DC).

<sup>3</sup> DL I 16 (T. 43 DC), IX 102 (T. 44 DC); Aristocles *apud* Eusebius, PE XIV 18, 2 (T. 53 DC). However, at AM I 281–282, Sextus mentions a poem for Alexander. Cf. Bett (2000), 1 n. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Brunschwig (1997), 299. For a critical approach to the bio-doxographical material on Pyrrho, see Bett (2000), ch. 2.

<sup>5</sup> By ‘Pyrrhonism’ I mean the ancient philosophical movement which defined itself in reference to Pyrrho. It includes the first Pyrrhonians (Timon in the first place, but also Eurylochus, Philo of Athens, and Hecataeus of Abdera; cf. DL IX 67–69) and the ‘neo-Pyrrhonians’ from Aenesidemus to Saturninus, the pupil of Sextus mentioned in DL IX

even if most of Timon's work has been lost, this first Pyrrhonian is known to have been a prolific author; and Sextus in turn is not particularly aphasic. Should we conclude that their Pyrrhonism has a 'dogmatic' relationship to writing, in the sense that by writing they accede to communicating the opinions they seem to hold, something that Pyrrho deliberately avoids for philosophical reasons? Does this fact mean that they commit a kind of parricide against a philosopher whom they chose to present, if not as a master, at least as their main reference?<sup>6</sup> Ever since the works of Victor Brochard and later Marcel Conche on Pyrrho, scholars have insisted on the discontinuity of the Pyrrhonian tradition.<sup>7</sup> It is a fact that in the interval between Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, the philosophy of Pyrrhonism underwent transformations, for example into 'skepticism'.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Pyrrhonism was never a school or a tradition with a succession of scholars and theses defining its core; consequently let us set aside the conventional wisdom in favor of a fresh inquiry as to the identity or the continuity of Pyrrhonism. One way to go about this might be to ask why Pyrrhonian philosophers chose such an odd master, and what, in their philosophy, could correspond to Pyrrho's position. The aim of this paper is to focus on the Pyrrhonian writing style in order to show some continuity in ancient Pyrrhonism: after a short overview of Timon's compositional form, I shall investigate how Sextus handles the Pyrrhonians' mistrust of writing in his own philosophical works.

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116. However, speaking of 'Pyrrhonism' does not imply the existence of this movement as a school or its historical continuity. Note also that I will use 'Pyrrhonism' and 'Skepticism' (with a capital 'S') interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> Timon was considered as ὁ προφήτης τῶν Πύρρωνος λόγων by Sextus (*AM* I 53) who also says that "Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to Scepticism more systematically and conspicuously than anyone before him" (*PH* I 7; I follow the translation in Annas & Barnes 2000). Even if we have reasons to presume that Sextus tries to introduce some distance between his own outlook and Pyrrho's (cf. Lévy 2001, 316 ff.), such a declaration testifies that, for Sextus, there is a common feature between him and Pyrrho.

<sup>7</sup> See Brochard (2002), 82: "le père du pyrrhonisme paraît avoir été fort peu pyrrhonien." See also Couissin (1929), 329; Conche (1994), 56; Declava Caizzi (1981a), 96; Bett (2000), 3 ff.; Spinelli (2005b), 3–4.

<sup>8</sup> It is sufficient to say, for now, that Pyrrho did not use the term 'skepticism'. The technical sense of the term may have appeared with Timon (cf. *PH* I 223; fr. 59 Di Marco 1989), who uses σκεπτοσύνη (see Mansfeld 1987, 295; *contra* cf. Bett 2000, 148). The term more probably arises in the first century BC with Aenesidemus; at least it appears clearly with this sense in a passage of Philo of Alexandria (*Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesis* III 33). For a study of Philo's links with Skepticism, cf. Bréhier (1907), 209 ff., Lévy (1986, 2008).

2. *Timon*

As regards Timon, Diogenes Laertius tells us that he “used to write poems. These included epics, tragedies, satyric dramas, thirty comedies and sixty tragedies, besides *Silloi* (lampoons) and *Indalmoi*. There are also reputed works of his extending to twenty thousand verses ...” (DL IX 110–111).<sup>9</sup> Although we know that Timon also wrote ‘classical’ philosophical treatises, like the *Περὶ αἰσθήσεως* mentioned by Diogenes Laertius IX 105 and a *Πρὸς τοὺς φυσικοὺς*,<sup>10</sup> the few extant lines of these works give evidence of an effort to escape from classical philosophical forms. Moreover, the *Silloi*—described by Aristocles of Messene as “insults against all men”<sup>11</sup>—criticize the “disease of gossip” within the whole history of philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Even though it appears that Timon made efforts to convert his master’s attitude into discourses,<sup>13</sup> it also seems that he tried to invent some original ways to expound his philosophical position in a manner that does not totally betray Pyrrho’s tenet of avoiding writing. The *Pytho*, for instance, adopts a narrative style for expounding his first encounter with Pyrrho. This narration—polemically summarized by Aristocles<sup>14</sup>—shows signs of symbolic construction: the encounter between Timon and Pyrrho happened in the sanctuary of Amphiaraus, a hero with some Pyrrhonian virtues.<sup>15</sup> So, even though the *Pytho* included some theoretical passages like the famous T. 53,<sup>16</sup> such passages were inserted inside a literary construction comparable in its subtlety to that of Plato’s dialogues.

<sup>9</sup> Translation by Hicks corrected following Brunschwig (1995), 272 n. 1, who suggests reading *ἰνδαλμοὺς* instead of *κιναίδους*.

<sup>10</sup> See AM III 2, to be connected with quotations at AM VI 66 and AM X 197.

<sup>11</sup> Translation by Chiesara (2001), 26 (fr. 4).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Eusebius, *PE* XIV 18, 16 (fr. 22 Di Marco). See also DL II 26 (fr. 26 Di Marco), where we find a criticism of writing. Regarding the denunciation of gossiping philosophers, Plato was one of his favorite targets (cf. DL III 7, fr. 30 Di Marco), and with him “the prolixity of the Academics unseasoned by salt” (DL IV 67, fr. 35 Di Marco).

<sup>13</sup> The distinction between Pyrrho’s *διάθεσις* and *λόγοι* is made by Nausiphanes, cf. DL IX 64 (T. 28 DC).

<sup>14</sup> Eusebius, *PE* XIV 18, 14 (Chiesara 2001, 25; fr. 4).

<sup>15</sup> On this encounter, cf. Untersteiner (1971), 643, for whom Amphiaraus “poteva in qualche modo essere considerato un precursore del sistema di vita predicato da Pirrone e da questi insegnato a Timone.” See also Long (1978), 74, who emphasizes the parallelism with “the Pythian response to Chaerephon’s question about Socrates.”

<sup>16</sup> For this location of T. 53, cf. Decleva Caizzi (1981b), 220 and Long (1978), 83 n. 6.

The case of the *Indalmoi* is also interesting. Though the extant fragments seem to express an unequivocal admiration for the wise Pyrrho,<sup>17</sup> Sextus himself shows at *AM* I 305 that Timon's verses admit a plurality of interpretations. Besides, Jacques Brunschwig has confirmed the subtlety of this work by underscoring how the "images" of Pyrrho provided by Timon should be interpreted in light of the Homeric context of *Odyssey* XIX 224. Hence, this parody involves the clear awareness of the production of a literary portrait of Pyrrho rather than a historical testimony.<sup>18</sup> Finally, as for the *Silloi*, it is obvious that we are in presence of a pioneering endeavor towards a critical history of philosophy, in which its compositional form—a Homeric parody of *κατάβασις εἰς Ἄϊδον*—is of great significance. The ancients, moreover, recognized the originality and difficulty of the Timonian venture since we know that there were at least two commentaries entitled *On the Silloi*.<sup>19</sup> The *Silloi* launched a new literary genre—which takes its very name from the title *Silloi*—that attained such preeminence that, retrospectively, some of the ancients tried to attribute its invention to Xenophanes and even to Homer.<sup>20</sup> Timon shows, indeed, great interest in philosophy, but it seems that he tries, by various literary means, to invent some original—and non-dogmatic—way to expound the Pyrrhonian philosophy. Perhaps it is also in this way that we can interpret the fact that he was, according to Diogenes Laertius, φιλοπόνητος (*DL* IX 110)<sup>21</sup> and φιλογράμματος (*DL* IX 113). It is possible that Timon understood that literature could be the vehicle of a very serious attempt to realize the Pyrrhonian philosophy. Hence, he does not really betray Pyrrho's mistrust of writing. On the contrary, his endeavor seems to achieve the adaptation of the uncompromising position of Pyrrho to philosophical debates.<sup>22</sup> His was a rather tricky situation. In any case,

<sup>17</sup> Cf. fr. 67 Diels (= T 61 DC) *apud* *DL* IX 64; *AM* XI 1; *AM* I 305–306 and fr. 68 Diels (= T 62 DC) *apud* *AM* XI 20.

<sup>18</sup> For this interpretation, see Brunschwig (1995), 281 ff. Cf. also Robin (1944), 31 ff.

<sup>19</sup> One by Apollonides of Nicaea in the first century BC (quoted by *DL* IX 109), and another by Sotion of Alexandria (quoted by Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* VIII 366d).

<sup>20</sup> For Xenophanes, cf. *DK*20A20, A22, and the Wachsmuth's *Sillographorum graecorum reliquae* (1885), who edited Xenophanes as a *sillographos* together with Crates and Timon. For the Alexandrian tentative to go back to Homer, cf. *DK*20A23. Untersteiner insists in his *Senofane* (1956) on the fact that "è probabile che Σίλλοι sia il titolo originale solo dell'opera di Timone." See also Di Marco (1989), 17 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Following Brunschwig's correction of the φιλοπότης of the manuscripts.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Decleva Caizzi (1986), 176, who shows that it is Timon who introduces Pyrrho's λόγοι in Hellenistic philosophy.



from the extant fragments of his work, we can judge that he invented a new alternative to Pyrrho's ἀφασία.<sup>23</sup> Poetry, humor, and parody are for Timon among the means by which to disseminate Pyrrho's original position—which certainly would have been lost without him—without committing a parricide.

### 3. *Sextus Empiricus*

What about Sextus Empiricus? Formally speaking, his works look like classical treatises; nothing in them shows the innovation or the fantasy found in Timon's writings. It seems that Sextus takes the danger of dogmatism as something that merely formal innovations or literary means are insufficient to thwart. Then, how can Sextus write without being committed to opinions? This problem can easily be expressed from a philosophical and Skeptical point of view. For Sextus, what is under investigation is not "what is apparent" (τὸ φαινόμενον), but "what is said about what is apparent" (τὸ περὶ τοῦ φαινομένου λεγόμενον) (*PH* I 20). Language's natural tendency to describe things produces an additional opinion which separates the subject from his experience or from the φαντασία παθητική, the "passive appearance."<sup>24</sup> But how can a Skeptic write without holding an opinion? How can he follow only "what is apparent to him" and at the same time keep on doing philosophy? As Françoise Desbordes says, "le scepticisme est un effort infini pour déminer le langage, le faire pure transparence où n'interviendrait plus aucune volonté étrangère à ce qui doit *se dire*."<sup>25</sup> But in order to restrict oneself to this "pure transparency," isn't it necessary to renounce writing, if not speaking?

Yet Sextus did write, and if he did so we have to presume that he did not see any contradiction in this activity. On the contrary, his extant works show a manner of writing which is consistent with his Skeptical disposition. By inquiring into Sextus' manner of writing, we intend to

<sup>23</sup> Clayman (2009), 32–33 assumes that Pyrrho also was writing philosophical parodies on the basis of his attested interest in Homeric poetry. If, admittedly, Sextus testifies at *AM* I 281 (T. 21 DC) of a parodical interest in Homer, the hypothesis that he wrote philosophical parodies remains highly speculative.

<sup>24</sup> For the criticism of the dogmatic tendency to προσδοξάζειν cf. *PH* I 30, III 236; *AM* XI 158, 166; *AM* VI 20. This use of the term has an Epicurean origin, cf. Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum* 50 (see also Lucretius IV 464–465).

<sup>25</sup> Desbordes (1982), 62.

show that, as Timon did by other means, Sextus tried to invent a Skeptical form of writing. Although Sextus fiercely criticizes rhetoric, there may exist a kind of ‘Skeptical rhetoric’ clearly connected to the peculiarity of the Pyrrhonian philosophy and its aims.<sup>26</sup> To describe this rhetoric, we will successively study (a) the subjective nature of the Skeptic’s ‘avowals’, (b) Sextus’ pragmatic strategy of writing, and (c) his use of the history of philosophy.

### 3.a. *The Subjective Nature of the Skeptic’s ‘Avowals’*

The first peculiarity of the Skeptic’s style of writing is that his utterances are subjective reports of the way things appear to him.<sup>27</sup> The first lines of Sextus’ *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* emphasize this point:

By way of preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things certainly are just as we say they are: rather, we report descriptively (ἱστορικῶς ἀπαγγέλλομεν) on each item according to how it appears to us at the time. (PH I 4)

This is indeed a peculiar way to begin a philosophical writing: Sextus’ discourse does not intend to give an objective description of reality, but expresses only the φαινόμενον, that is to say, “what is apparent” to him. This characteristic coincides with two important features of Pyrrhonism: the relativism expressed by the ten modes of Aenesidemus and the purpose of producing a pure form of Skepticism. Sextus wants to be, as he says, εἰλικρινῶς σκεπτικός, i.e., he intends to avoid any dogmatic commitment. Indeed, if the Skeptic limits his aim to “reporting descriptively” what appears to be the case *for him* and admits the possibility of other points of view, he is a kind of relativist, at least in the broad sense of the term.<sup>28</sup> Relativism can be regarded as a path to Skepticism: Sextus

<sup>26</sup> On this rhetoric, see Sluiter (2000), 104 ff., and Spinelli (forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Stough (1984), 138 ff.; Barnes (1990), 2623 ff.; Spinelli (1991), 59–64 and (2005c); Corti (2009), 148 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Scholars usually make a distinction between Skepticism and relativism, arguing that a relativist is a philosopher who thinks that “all the opinions are true” whereas the Skeptic is a philosopher who suspends his judgment on any opinion (cf. Annas & Barnes 1985, 97–98; Annas 1986, 10). Indeed, it is possible that a certain kind of relativism—a very sophisticated relativism, perhaps the one defended by Protagoras in *Theaetetus* 167a–b—advocates the existence of truth. But this does not mean that all relativists have such a conception. The Pyrrhonian skeptic uses relativist arguments to show the universal disagreement of opinions about the real nature of the objects. Cf. Everson (1985), 312–313; for an emphasis on the role of Aenesidemus in this use of relativity, see Woodruff (1988), 158 ff., and Bett (2000), 190–199.

tells us that the reason Protagoras “is thought to have something in common with the Pyrrhonists” is that “he posits only what is apparent to each person, and thus introduces relativity. Hence he is thought to have something in common with the Pyrrhonists” (*PH* I 216–217). Yet, if Sextus distinguishes between the two ways, it is because it appears to him that there is a difference between them: the relativist often argues by using some philosophical thesis about how things really are, namely about the nature of the subject, about how sense-perception works, or about the nature of the object perceived. Thus a consistent form of Skepticism should avoid this kind of affirmation and present its entire philosophical discourse as the description of a subjective experience; the Skeptic should describe the relativity of his own experience without being committed to any relativist position that makes dogmatic assertions about what is non-evident. By doing so, it is obvious that Sextus reduces the scope of the Skeptic's utterances. He is not producing a universal discourse, which is, however, one of the classical characteristics of philosophical discourse. His aim is more humble: he just wants to describe his paradoxical experience of discovering that the “standstill of the intellect” (στάσις διανοίας) or ἐποχή (*PH* I 10) is the secret to happiness.<sup>29</sup>

But this is theory. In practice, how does Sextus achieve this purpose? Such an aim not only requires a quite elaborate conception of language, but also presupposes a certain way of speaking and writing.<sup>30</sup> First of all, it implies refraining from using dogmatic forms of discourse: for instance, Sextus generally avoids the classical vocabulary of φάσις or ἀπόφασις.<sup>31</sup> By using the verb προφέρεσθαι and its cognates, Sextus emphasizes the fact that “the utterance of this remark is not dogmatic but a report of a human feeling which is apparent to the person who feels it.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, to “utter” is also to “report” (ἀπαγγέλλειν);<sup>33</sup> and to report is a Skeptical way to describe our experience without being committed to

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Spinelli (2008), 45.

<sup>30</sup> On this, see Glidden (1994), 138.

<sup>31</sup> This rule is justified at *PH* I 192; Sextus regularly uses the term for dogmatic affirmation, cf. *PH* I 18, 151, 170, 197 (οὐ <δογματικῶς> μετὰ πεποιθήσεως ἀποφανόμενος, following Mutschmann-Mau), 225; II 123 (καταληπτικὴν ἀπόφασιν). The term can be linked with βεβαιωτικῶς: *PH* II 9 and 28. See also *DL* IX 74. Nevertheless, this rule, as often in Pyrrhonian skepticism, is not absolute. Sextus himself mentions τὰς σκεπτικὰς ἀποφάσεις at *PH* I 5.

<sup>32</sup> *PH* I 203: ὥς εἶναι τὴν τοῦ λόγου προφορὰν οὐ δογματικὴν ἀλλ' ἀνθρωπείου πάθους ἀπαγγελίαν. Cf. Sluiter (2000), 95.

<sup>33</sup> See also the use of the term at *PH* I 4, 15, 197, 200; *AM* I 255, 258.

any kind of thesis. Likewise, Sextus uses the verb διηγοῦμαι (*PH* I 197), which implies a narrative way of speaking.<sup>34</sup> The ‘objectivity’ of a Skeptic consists in being as close as possible to his subjectivity, to his experience, trying not to add any opinion or judgment on his experience. Lastly, Sextus’ use of προφέρεσθαι is of no little interest: first, because its use is very common in his extant works;<sup>35</sup> and second, because it denotes a real attempt to distance himself from the Dogmatist’s discourse by using a term which classically refers to animal vocalizations rather than to human utterances. For dogmatic philosophers like Aristotle and the Stoics, articulated language is a human characteristic. Aristotle’s *Politics* argued that animals can express their pleasure and pain by way of φωναί, but cannot arrive at more abstract conceptions which are involved in the use of a λόγος.<sup>36</sup> For their part, the Stoics made a distinction between λέγειν and προφέρεσθαι. The latter term denotes only the “utterances” which are not λεκτά.<sup>37</sup> Sextus uses this Stoic distinction because it allows him to explain his own use of language, which he can compare with animal semantics.<sup>38</sup> So Sextus works in two ways: he criticizes humans’ claim to be the only species able to speak by developing an animal model of language which presupposes a weak use of thought and concept; and he shows that this model is also the model of a Skeptical use of language.<sup>39</sup>

More specifically, Sextus’ use of language involves his presentation of the φωναί σκεπτικάι. Although, as we shall see, Sextus demands that there be no “fighting over phrases” and that common usage be adhered to, he is aware that such a practice of philosophy produces something like a new language.<sup>40</sup> The section devoted to the φωναί σκεπτικάι (*PH* I 187–208) explains the sense of particular Skeptical expressions.

<sup>34</sup> The term appears also in a Pyrrhonian context in *DL* IX 74, 103.

<sup>35</sup> See *PH* I 14, 15, 188, 191, 193, 197, 204, 223; *AM* VIII 76, XI 147.

<sup>36</sup> *Politics*, I 1253a11 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *DL* VII 56 and *AM* VIII 80.

<sup>38</sup> See *AM* VIII 274–276 for a description of animal προφέρεσθαι (in a dogmatic context) and *PH* I 73. For this discussion with Stoicism and the model of Skeptical semantics, cf. Decleva Caizzi (1993) and Glidden (1994), 134 ff.

<sup>39</sup> This model is connected to the Skeptical conception of commemorative signs. Cf. Desbordes (1982), 65; see also Glidden (1983), 124.

<sup>40</sup> See Montaigne: “Je vois les philosophes Pyrrhoniens qui ne peuvent exprimer leur générale conception en aucune manière de parler: car il leur faudrait un nouveau langage” (*Essais* II, 12, 312).

The simple use of the word φωνή to denote the Skeptic's expression does make sense: the term indicates that the Pyrrhonian expressions entail no dogmatic commitment to beliefs.<sup>41</sup> The term also indicates Sextus' purpose of referring to a tradition as well as to invent a new—and pure—form of Skepticism. Some φωναί are, indeed, connected to the history of Pyrrhonism. This is the case of οὐ μᾶλλον and ἀφασία, which can be traced back to Pyrrho himself.<sup>42</sup> This is also the case of expressions like ἐπέχω (*PH* I 196), πάντα ἔστιν ἀκατάληπτα (*PH* I 200), ἀκαταληπτῶ, οὐ καταλαμβάνω (*PH* I 201), and παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἴσον ἀντικεῖσθαι (*PH* I 202 ff.). Although these expressions are not strictly Pyrrhonian, they are closely linked with the history of Pyrrhonism and are used to show the identity of Pyrrhonism by contrasting it with the New Academy's tradition. In all these cases, we can find the same Sextan method: rather than erasing words which have a historical meaning, Sextus prefers to use those terms, making clear their Skeptical meanings. As Sextus says, mere words are of little importance if only we agree on their meanings.<sup>43</sup>

By doing so, Sextus can justify his 'remake' of the historical Pyrrhonian discourse, or lack of discourse. So ἀφασία became, not only by way of a translation but also through a conceptual mutation, "non-assertion," that is to say, the "refraining from assertion in the general sense (which we say covers both affirmation and negation)" (*PH* I 192). Sextus retains from Pyrrho the idea that ἀφασία is a state which is convenient for the Pyrrhonist. But Sextus' definition opens the way for a Skeptical style of speaking and writing, a style by means of which the author "neither posits nor rejects anything."<sup>44</sup> It is quite the same situation with οὐ μᾶλλον, except for the fact that its origin is not exclusively Pyrrhonian.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> As Naess (1969), 7 has emphasized, "fonè is a highly noncommittal word."

<sup>42</sup> Cf. respectively *PH* I 188 ff. and 192 ff. Both of them appear in Pyrrho's T. 53 DC; οὐ μᾶλλον is used by Aenesidemus as a key expression of his Pyrrhonism *apud* Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 212, 170a1 ff. Οὐδὲν ὀρίζω (*PH* I 197) is also used by Aenesidemus, *apud* Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 212, 170a11.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *PH* I 191: "our intention is to make clear what is apparent to us, and as to what phrase we use to make this clear we are indifferent."

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Stough (1984). For the links between Pyrrho's and Sextus' ἀφασία, cf. Brunschwig (1997).

<sup>45</sup> Ἀφασία is a quite uncommon term which scarcely appears in Greek philosophy. Οὐ μᾶλλον is linked to the Democritean tradition (cf. DK68A8 and A38, B156), see De Lacy (1958). It appears also in the Platonic and Aristotelian criticisms of relativism, cf. *Theaetetus* 182e emphasized by Bett (2000), 132, and *Metaphysics* Γ 1009b10, quoted by Reale (1981), 320.

For historical reasons Sextus keeps the formula, but the formula *per se* lacks any particular function which might be absolutely necessary for a Pyrrhonian. It can even support a dogmatic interpretation.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the point is to elucidate the feeling which lies behind the use of this expression, and to do this we can even change its discourse-grammatical modality, namely, turn it into a question as “some Skeptics” have done, according to Sextus (*PH* I 191).

Such a strategy of neutralization of claims is also efficient when it comes to using other expressions less closely linked to the Pyrrhonian philosophy, but still intimately linked to the criticism of knowledge. We know from Sextus that, according to the Pyrrhonists, the skepticism of the neo-Academics is dogmatic because they deny the possibility of knowledge. The problem of the New Academy’s negative dogmatism—putting aside the historical validity of this accusation<sup>47</sup>—therefore lies in the affirmation of the ἀκαταληψία of things. Thus, one can be surprised by the mention of ἀκαταληψία among the Skeptical expressions. However, there is no contradiction precisely because it is only an expression. The strategy of neutralization which lies behind the Skeptical expressions allows Sextus the use of that concept in a way different from that of the neo-Academics; it even allows him to present a form of Skepticism in a more consistent way than Aenesidemus, who, according to Photius, affirms positively that certain notions “are beyond our reach and grasp” (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 212, 170b7–8).

This strategy manifests a two-level Skepticism. The first level is made up of the propositional content of each Skeptical expression which expresses the impossibility of knowledge. Regarding this level, it is enough to invoke arguments and philosophers which give us reasons to doubt the validity of any of our knowledge claims. Even though not all of them are “deniers of the criterion”<sup>48</sup> and even though some of them, on the contrary, define some criterion of truth, in any case they all produce a criticism of a certain kind of criterion.<sup>49</sup> But this level is exposed to

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<sup>46</sup> The risk of this dogmatic interpretation seems to appear when Sextus explains that the formula is elliptical: “When we say ‘No more’ we implicitly say ‘No more this than that’” (*PH* I 188). A dogmatic interpretation would consist in understanding “No more” as a way of rejecting both theses.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Lévy (1992), 29; Striker (1996), 136; Ioppolo (2009), 112; and Marchand (2010), 130 ff.

<sup>48</sup> See the list at *AM* VII 48.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Parmenides’ criticism of “opinion-based reasoning” (*AM* VII 111),

contradiction because it has the same logical status as any dogmatic affirmation or negation: the thesis of the impossibility of knowledge remains a thesis. To be consistent, Sextus' skepticism has to produce a second-order skepticism in order to escape the so-called objection of 'metadogmatism'.<sup>50</sup> Sextus' explanation of the *φωναὶ σκεπτικαί* as a form of noncommittal language is a coherent reply to this objection. Therefore, Sextus' style of writing is first defined by this 'second-order' strategy: the purpose of presenting all his claims as subjective avowals. As Sextus points out, a Skeptical claim is always uttered with an implicit "as it appears to me" (*ὥς ἔμοι φαίνεται*, *PH I* 202). His writing style is relativist in the sense that what he says and writes never signifies "anything purely but only relatively, i.e., relative to the Skeptics" (*PH I* 207).<sup>51</sup>

Yet, can we really assume that this relativist conception of language may be applied to Sextus' discourse in general? Perhaps yes in a broad sense, but such a conception applies primarily to a certain kind of Skeptical discourse, namely the so-called "general account," wherein he "sets out the distinctive character of Skepticism," and not to the "specific account" wherein he argues "against each of the parts of what they [sc. the Dogmatists] call philosophy" (*PH I* 5–6). The reason is that only in the general account is he compelled to reveal the principles of his philosophy, and it is there, in the general account, where the Skeptical philosopher can fall into contradiction. Although there is but a single general account in the extant works of Sextus, namely, the first part of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, it is nevertheless probable that there was another general account in the *Against the Dogmatists*, which is widely considered to have a lost beginning section.<sup>52</sup> But we can presume that if the "specific account" occupies the major part of Sextus' works it is also because Sextus was trying to refrain from having reflexive discourse, or meta-discourse, on his Pyrrhonism. Yet he cannot totally avoid it, or he would not be a philosopher: his position has to be grounded even if he cannot

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Heraclitus' criticism of "sense-perception" (*AM VII* 126), and Democritus' criticism of "the things that appear to the senses" (*AM VII* 135). I use Bett's translation of *Against the Logicians*.

<sup>50</sup> On this notion, see Barnes (1992), 4252 n. 54 and 4254 n. 72.

<sup>51</sup> Regarding the importance of relativity, *PH I* 39 shows how the ten tropes of Aenesidemus can be referred to the relativity mode, which is the "most generic."

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *AM VII* 1, and Bett (2005), xi.

produce anything else than subjective legitimacy. This is the only moment where the second-order strategy is necessary. Therefore, his subjective style corresponds to the explanation of the Skeptical endeavor, not to its realization. Besides, how could the narration of a subjective experience convince anyone to be a Skeptic? Therefore, even if this second-order strategy is fascinating, we cannot restrict Sextus' style of writing to this highly sophisticated strategy.

### 3.b. *Sextus' Pragmatic Strategy of Writing*

To understand the second characteristic of Sextus' writing style, it is necessary to examine his criticism of dogmatic writing. Sextus criticizes the δογματική εὐρεσιλογία, "the subtleties of the Dogmatists" (*PH* II 9), which is also ἀπειρολογία, an "endless verbiage" (*PH* II 51).<sup>53</sup> This criticism, moreover, is not restricted to dogmatic philosophers; it can be extended to all kind of professors, as is done for instance in *Against the Grammarians*, with its denunciations of grammarians for their "grammatical old wives' talk" (γραμματικῆς γρασιολογίας πλήρες) (*AM* I 141) or their propensity to "nit-pick" (λεπτολογεῖν) (*AM* I 65) because they invent a complex technical language to speak about a language that all the Greek world, even its most uneducated part, understands well.<sup>54</sup> The main Skeptical argument against any kind of technical or scientific language is not that it is conventional, since Sextus recognizes that all the names and languages are conventional: "each group uses the word as it has imposed it" (*AM* I 149).<sup>55</sup> The only reason why a Skeptic can criticize a linguistic use is either if it suggests that language describes things objectively,<sup>56</sup> or if it has no utility.<sup>57</sup> Thus a Skeptical attitude

<sup>53</sup> For the criticisms of εὐρεσιλογία, see also *AM* XI 7 (where Sextus qualifies it as σοφιστικῶς) and Spinelli (1995), 156. See also *PH* I 63, II 84.

<sup>54</sup> For the *Against the Grammarians*, I follow the translation in Blank (1998).

<sup>55</sup> ἕκαστος γὰρ, ὡς τεθεμάτικεν, οὕτω χρῆται. See also *AM* I 145, οὐκ ἄρα φύσει σημαίνει τὰ ὀνόματα: "names do not signify by nature." This defense of a conventionalist pattern does not prevent Sextus from making a criticism of the thesis that names signify things by imposition (θέσει) at *AM* I 38.

<sup>56</sup> At *PH* I 14, Sextus gives the following definition of dogmatism: "for if you hold beliefs, then you posit as real the things you are said to hold beliefs about" (ὁ μὲν γὰρ δογματίζων ὡς ὑπάρχον τίθεται τὸ πρᾶγμα ἐκεῖνο ὃ λέγεται δογματίζειν).

<sup>57</sup> At *AM* I 98, Sextus points out: "we are also encouraged in no small measure whenever we see grammarians hardly able to string two words together with style purport to censure as barbarous every one of the great ancient writers of careful Greek style like Thucydides, Plato and Demosthenes." See also *AM* II 16–17: "It is possible to make a speech quite successfully and well without studied rhetoric" (Bury's translation).



toward language implies accepting norms which rely on usages, keeping in mind that these usages are always manifold:<sup>58</sup>

Whenever you say that barbarism is a mistake against usage in a single word, we shall check you by asking which usage you mean, there being many, and whichever you respond, we shall say that we too follow that one. Thus, while the impasse is common to both of us, for us its solution is not difficult. For some usages are for sciences and others are for ordinary life. For example, certain terms are accepted in philosophy, and especially in medicine and also in music and geometry, but there is also a simple usage suited to the life of the average people, which differs among cities and peoples. Hence in philosophy we shall line up with the usage of the philosophers, in medicine with medical usage, and in life with the customary, unaffected, local usage. That way, even when the same thing is said in two ways, we shall attempt to fit in with the people around us and say what is not going to be laughed at, no matter what it is in nature.

(AM I 231–234)

Hence, even though Sextus criticizes the grammarians' tendency to produce norms, he himself produces a norm of the right use of language, but he does so with the proviso that this norm is always changing and depends on context. Neither the *πρέπον* mentioned at AM I 235 nor average usage are classical norms, since they describe the need to change the rule in every particular instance of communication.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, a Pyrrhonian skeptic needs to accept that, to be understood, he cannot really have his own philosophical style, but continually has to adapt his speeches to his audience. Nor can the language used by Sextus be, strictly speaking, his language: he uses a language constituted by norms and usages which are fundamentally exterior to him.<sup>60</sup> The Skeptic uses a given language for the same reason a person who uses a coin selects

<sup>58</sup> Sextus also mentions the plurality of usages at AM I 229 and 236.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Dalimier (1991), 25: "[L' ἑλληνίζειν] est un système instable, sans point de référence fixe qui produit certaines analogies apparentes repérables en un lieu et temps, mais se transforme indéfiniment au cours des échanges verbaux."

<sup>60</sup> This feature does not prevent the Skeptic from taking into account the "purity of one's language" (τῆς περὶ τὰς διαλέκτους καθαριότητος): "one who speaks good Greek is able to express clearly and accurately what he has in mind. Now there are two kinds of Hellenism, for one form is divorced from our common usage and seems to proceed according to grammatical analogy, while the other form accords with the usage of each of the Greeks and advances by assimilation (παραπλασμοῦ) and observation in conversation (τῆς ἐν ταῖς ὁμιλίαις παρατηρήσεως)" (AM I 176). According to Dickey (2007), 251, a παραπλασμός is a "change of grammatical form." The norm of a Skeptical "good Greek" is also defined in relation to usage and to our capacity to adapt to usage.

the one that is in circulation where he happens to be.<sup>61</sup> This fact has two important consequences. First, it implies that Pyrrhonian discourses are provisional not only because Pyrrhonists should change the thesis they use to produce ἰσοσθένεια depending on the thesis they are trying to refute,<sup>62</sup> but also because they have to correspond to the interlocutor's peculiar way of speaking, which depends on culture and history.<sup>63</sup> Second, it means that the only criterion of the Skeptical style is pragmatic.

This is one of the most important features of Sextus' manner of writing: to speak πραγματικῶς.<sup>64</sup> To have a pragmatic style supposes, first, that comprehension is the only concern of Pyrrhonian discourse. For this reason, Sextus emphasizes the fact that "it is unbecoming for a Skeptic to fight over phrases" (*PH* I 207).<sup>65</sup> It supposes, in addition, the elucidation of the senses of the terms and the propositions the Skeptic is talking about. Hence, the Skeptical method makes distinctions between what is said strictly (κυρίως) and what is said loosely (καταχρηστικῶς).<sup>66</sup> Finally, the Skeptic's pragmatic style implies renouncing strictness and precision in speaking. Admittedly, Sextus elsewhere affirms that "in life or in common usage loose talk has its place; but when we are investigating things in reference to their nature, then we have to maintain precision" (*AM* VIII 129). But Sextus presents Pyrrhonism as a philosophy which

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<sup>61</sup> For the comparison with the coin, cf. *AM* I 178–179: "Just as when a coin is in local circulation in a city, one who uses this coin is able to do his business in that city unhindered, while one who does not accept this coin but mints himself a new and different one is shown up for a fool when he wants to be accepted with it, in life too the one who does not want to follow the form of speech which, like a coin, is commonly accepted but prefers to mint a private one for himself is close to insanity." On this passage, see Spinelli (1991), 62.

<sup>62</sup> See *PH* III 280–281 for the Skeptical choice of arguments depending on both the degree of dogmatic affliction and the strength of those arguments (κατὰ δύναμιν), following Pellegrin's translation (1997) against Annas and Barnes (2000), *pace* Machuca (2009), 107–108.

<sup>63</sup> This is why, in philosophy, the vocabulary and the concepts used by Sextus are mostly Stoic, because they are, as Sextus says at *PH* I 65, his "chief opponents." On this passage, cf. Declava Caizzi (1993), 319ff. For the importance of this strategy to understand Sextus' peculiar way of thinking, see Machuca (2006), 137.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *AM* I 7, V 106, VI 38, 68. Cf. Caujolle-Zaslowsky (1986), 321 ff. The question is what, for a Skeptical philosopher, is to be efficient or pragmatic. Emilio Spinelli emphasizes the link between this adverb and what is considered as a fact (τὸ πρᾶγμα), since for him the adverb "serve a caratterizzare un tipo di obiezioni avanzate in virtù di argomentazioni ancorate a dati di fatto" (Spinelli 2000, 180). Cf. also Bett (2006), 22–23 and the discussion in Delattre (2006), 135–136.

<sup>65</sup> οὔτε γὰρ πρέπει τῷ σκεπτικῷ φωνομαχεῖν. See also *PH* I 195.

<sup>66</sup> *PH* III 119; see also e.g. *AM* VI 2. Cf. Corti (2009), 125 ff.

positively chooses the way of daily life and common usage,<sup>67</sup> a philosophy which consequently accepts *κατάχρησις*. For this reason his *φωναὶ σκεπτικαί* are *κατάχρησεις* (*PH* I 207); and I assume that it should be also the case for all his own philosophical discourse. I have already mentioned the Pyrrhonian dream of inventing a new language which would express the Skeptical lack of commitment to language.<sup>68</sup> But as we have seen, even in the case of the *φωναὶ σκεπτικαί*, the Skeptic's purpose is mainly to clarify the sense of his expressions.

Sextus' pragmatic attitude has another obvious effect on his writings. He quite often insists on the need to be effective and concise. This necessity is the reason why he wrote his *Outlines*.<sup>69</sup> This term is probably borrowed from the Empirical school of medicine, since Galen emphasizes that Empirical physicians "try mainly to avoid definition but use outlines and sketches, what they themselves call discourses which express in a few words the notion of an object."<sup>70</sup> In the same way, Sextus speaks in outline, *ὡς ἐν ὑποτυπώσει*.<sup>71</sup> Hence, a Skeptical style should be concise, giving just the essential lines of the arguments while overlooking the details.

<sup>67</sup> For this choice of daily life, see Spinelli (2008), 43 ff.

<sup>68</sup> This is the dream expressed by Aenesidemus according to Photius (see *Bibliotheca*, cod. 212, 170a12: ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔχοντες, φησὶν, ὅπως τὸ νοούμενον ἐκλαλήσωμεν, οὕτω φράζομεν).

<sup>69</sup> This aim seems to be older than Sextus, since the term is connected to Aenesidemus by Diogenes (IX 78: τῇ εἰς τὰ Πυρρώνεια ὑποτυπώσει) and by Aristocles (*apud* Eusebius, *PE* XIV 18, 11); see also the summary of Aenesidemus' work by Photius: ἐφεξῆς δὲ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον πρῶτον καὶ τὴν ὅλην ἀγωγὴν ὡς τύπῳ καὶ κεφαλαιωδῶς τῶν Πυρρωνίων παραδίδωσι λόγων (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 212, 170a41 ff.). There is, indeed, a discrepancy between this ambition and the Pyrrhonian purpose of following common usage (which can be assigned to the Timonian reference to *συνήθεια*, *DL* IX 105). Anyhow, Sextus seems to be aware that the ambition to invent a new language does not totally fit in with the Pyrrhonian principle to follow common usage. Cf. Caujolle-Zaslavsky (1986), 316.

<sup>70</sup> Galen, *De Diff. Puls.* VIII 720 (Deichgräber 1965, 174): τὴν ἀρχὴν οὐδ' ὀρίξεσθαι σπουδάζουσιν οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐμπειρικῆς αἰρέσεως, ἀλλ' ὑποτυπώσεσσι τε καὶ ὑπογραφαῖς χρῶνται. Καλοῦσι δ' οὕτως αὐτοὶ τοὺς λόγους, ὅσοι διὰ βραχέων ἐρμηνεύουσι τὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ πράγματος. On this Empirical theme, see also VIII 708 (Deichgräber 1965, 135) and Galen's τῆς ἐμπειρικῆς ἀγωγῆς ὑποτυπώσεις (*De libris propriis*, K. XIX 12, 18). It is also interesting that Empirical references to Pyrrho mention his concision, cf. *Subfiguratio Empirica* chap. XI 82–84 (= T. 67 and 68 DC).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *PH* I 206, 222, 239; II 79, 185, 193; III 1, 114, 167, 279. See also *PH* I 4: ὑποτυπωτικῶς ... ἐροῦμεν. The purpose of concision is also expressed by references to the "brevity" (*συντομία*) (*PH* I 231), *συντόμως* (*PH* II 1), or to the fact that he speaks "in summary" (*κεφαλαιωδῶς*) (*PH* III 168, *AM* IX 206).

But how could this style be that of Sextus, who was a prolific author and not a very concise one? And in what sense are the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* ὑποτυπώσεις? A first answer has to do with the fact that Pyrrhonian discourses do not develop all the theories and examples they could. To indicate some cases of contradictions without expounding all the cases is sufficient to show the Skeptic's way. Hence, to respect "the outline character of [his] essay" (τὸν ὑποτυπωτικὸν τρόπον τῆς συγγραφῆς) implies for Sextus refraining from "discussing each case" (μὴ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγων) (PH I 239).<sup>72</sup> Although in many respects Sextus' discourses present detailed arguments, his main purpose nevertheless seems to be to present a method for organizing all kinds of arguments or counter-examples.<sup>73</sup> This feature clearly appears for instance in the ethical part of Sextus' works. It would be pointless for a Pyrrhonist to describe all contradictory customs or laws. It is sufficient to describe a few cases of contradictions to show the infinite diversity of customs and laws and the impossibility of moral or ethical *consensus*. By his choice of examples, Sextus covers the whole field of ethics and challenges all our moral beliefs, even those which seem to be shared by everybody, like the necessity to be dressed to live in community, or the rejection of incest and cannibalism.<sup>74</sup> In theory, the principle of the second mode of Aenesidemus "from the differences among humans" could produce infinite possibilities of contradiction.<sup>75</sup> However, in practice, simply by evoking some notorious original idiosyncrasies, equipollence can be achieved, even on matters which exceed the field of ethics.<sup>76</sup>

Hence, there is a principle of parsimony in Sextus' manner of speaking ὑποτυπωτικῶς. This first characterization is at odds with the rhetorical definition of ὑποτύπωσις, which Quintilian, following Cicero, indeed defines as "any representation of facts which is made in such vivid language that they appeal to the eye rather than the ear."<sup>77</sup> Thus, whereas

<sup>72</sup> See also PH III 222: "although I could give a vast number of other similar cases, I pass them over since I am aiming at brevity."

<sup>73</sup> See Annas and Barnes (2000), 3 n. 2 for textual references in PH.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. respectively PH III 204, 205, and 207.

<sup>75</sup> On this mode, cf. PH I 80. DL IX 80 who speaks of a "reference to the nature and idiosyncrasies of men"; and Philo of Alexandria, *De ebrietate* 176. See Caujolle-Zaslavsky (1990), 143: "les idiosyncrasies constituent ainsi pour l'argumentation anti-dogmatique du sceptique, une réserve infinie de contre-exemples."

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Demophon, "Alexander's waiter, used to shiver when he was in the sun or the baths and felt warm in the shade" (PH I 82). See also DL IX 80.

<sup>77</sup> H.E. Butler's translation of *Institutio Oratoria* IX 2, 40: *proposita quaedam for-*

Quintilian presents the ὑποτύπωσις as a way to expound facts in detail (*nec universa sed per partis*), Sextus presents his ὑποτυπώσεις as discourses which should not enter into the entire details of the arguments. However, it is possible that these two different conceptions are not contradictory and correspond to the different purposes of a rhetorical and a philosophical discourse. After all, Quintilian stresses not so much the fact that a ὑποτύπωσις necessarily has many vivid details, but the fact that such a figure has a strong effect because we see what we are hearing, which is why he connects it with *evidentia*.<sup>78</sup> Sextus' aim of speaking ὑποτυπωτικῶς is linked to the same purpose: to produce an effect, a πάθος, namely ἐποχή.<sup>79</sup> This is the result of equipollence or ἰσοσθένεια; to produce it we can go into the details of two opposite theses. But this is not the only way. It is the way to produce a local equipollence, but Sextus' aim of creating some general arguments which can be opposed to any thesis implies that we can be Skeptical in a general way, i.e., following upon the arguments in favor of doubting the possibility of knowledge.<sup>80</sup> This general purpose defines Sextus' philosophical style. He understands that expounding all the arguments which can serve to produce equipollence can be counter-productive because nobody would read a work which would be more a catalog than a book. Sextus, indeed, criticizes such an inappropriate method:

Not that we propose to contest each of their [*sc.* the Dogmatists'] opinions about standards one by one—for the dispute is vast, and in that way we too would necessarily fall into giving an unmethodical account. (PH II 21)

So, in order to realize a Skeptical discourse which corresponds to the rhetorical aim to “appeal to the eye rather than the ear,” it will be convenient to avoid detail and to use general strong arguments against the possibility of knowledge.

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*ma rerum ita expressa verbis ut cerni potius videantur quam audiri*; see also Cicero, *De Oratore* III 202.

<sup>78</sup> For an attempt to connect these two senses of ὑποτύπωσις, see Laurent (1993), 649: “nul besoin de connaître le tout de la chose pour en faire apparaître la présence.”

<sup>79</sup> For the fact that ἐποχή is a πάθος, cf. PH I 7 and DL IX 70. See also PH I 31, where Sextus says that “suspension of judgment comes about (περιγίνεται) through the opposition of things.”

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Palmer (2000), 357, who speaks about Agrippa's modes as “a ready-made method for Sextus” and says that “it is a properly Skeptical method in that it has the special feature of not relying on any particular theory of *why* it works (cf. PH I 35), but it is a method nonetheless, a set of specific argument-types that equips the Skeptic for his investigation of the various claims made by philosophers and other presumed experts regarding things non-evident.”

One may argue that speaking ὑποτυπωτικῶς is a general property not so much of Skeptical style as of Sextus' *Outlines*,<sup>81</sup> citing the fact that ὑποτύπωσις and its cognates occur only in this work. Shall we therefore conclude that the ὑποτύπωσις is just a rhetorical means of presenting the Skeptical way which is fundamentally exterior to it? I think not. First, because of the tradition of such a concept in the Pyrrhonian movement and in the Empirical school of medicine which we already mentioned. Second, because the principle of parsimony we see in the concept of ὑποτύπωσις has some equivalent in Sextus' other works. The feature of the ὑποτυπωτικός style is related to the preference for universal arguments over particular arguments because they are parsimonious: this allows one to attack many philosophical theses, as Sextus shows at *PH* II 194, where this method is linked with the aim of speaking ἐν ὑποτυπώσει.<sup>82</sup> Such a method can be clearly seen, as just noted, in other works besides *PH*.<sup>83</sup> The generality of arguments is their ability to overthrow not only a single argument but an entire theory; for this reason Sextus can speak of "more general arguments" (καθολικώτερον), opposed to those "more specific" (ἰδιαίτερον or πρὸς τὰ ἕκαστα) (*AM* I 8). The power of general arguments is described by the metaphor of the foundation found several times in Sextus' extant works.<sup>84</sup> He emphasizes the methodical sense of this metaphor in a crucial text of *Against the Grammarians*:

But since we set out not only to give a general argument against all the representatives of the liberal studies, but also a specific argument against each one, let us assume that there is such a thing as a study and that learning is possible, and then see whether the professed claim of each study is possible. For these refutations let us not take everything said by those whom we are refuting (for that would be not only harsh and unsystematic, but perhaps even impossible) nor should we take random bits from all of them (for that might not finish them off), but let us take the sayings whose negation negates everything else along with them. When men try to capture a city they try most of all to gain possession of those things whose capture involves that of the city as well: they pull down the walls, for example, or burn the fleet or cut off the necessities of life. In the same way in our struggle with the representatives of the liberal studies let us attack the same thing, the points on which the salvation of all this doctrine

<sup>81</sup> I am indebted to Diego Machuca for this objection.

<sup>82</sup> See also *PH* III 1.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. *AM* VII 26, *AM* I 96, III 18.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *PH* II 84, *AM* III 10.

depends, for example their first principles, or the general methods they use to argue from the first principles, or their goals.<sup>85</sup> (AM I 39–40)

This passage expresses one of the crucial features of the Skeptical method. It is necessary to write outlines because dogmatism has a stockpile of arguments which is impossible to refute one by one.<sup>86</sup> To write the catalog of all the arguments against dogmatism is useless. A Skeptic who philanthropically undertakes to overthrow all dogmatic theories one by one obviously does not understand either the structure of dogmatism or the Skeptical method. Skepticism needs to construct a special kind of refutation which is sufficiently general to show his audience that all dogmatic theses are involved in his criticism, and sufficiently precise to show that it is really possible that “to every account an equal account [can be] opposed” (PH I 12). That is the reason why, for Sextus, a clever Skeptic writes in outlines and seeks brevity to the extent that the dogmatism he is fighting with allows it.

### 3.c. *History*

However, even a cursory reading of Sextus' work shows long passages that do not quite conform to what Sextus calls 'brevity'. Scholars have emphasized Sextus' tendency to accumulate more arguments than necessary. This tendency forms the third characteristic of the Skeptical writing style. Perhaps it will seem incompatible with the preceding characteristic; but this contradiction is the result of the philosophical difficulty of Skepticism: to give a Skeptical answer to all kinds of dogmatism.

First of all, this characteristic has to be linked with Gorgias' argumentation by concession.<sup>87</sup> This kind of argumentation allows one to produce

<sup>85</sup> See Blank (1998), 107, who compares the passage with AM IX 1–3 and explains that “the rejected mode of attack is that of Clitomachus and the Academics, who get bogged down in details and make their arguments overly lengthy because they enter into hostile territory and argue by conceding the opposing doctrines.” On this opposition, see also Decleva Caizzi (1992), 289.

<sup>86</sup> See AM VIII 337a: “however, since it is appropriate to be methodical in making our rebuttals, we should ask which demonstration we must oppose the most. Now, if we want to oppose particular demonstrations applying to each skill, we will be unmethodical in making our opposition, since such demonstrations are endless.”

<sup>87</sup> See *On What Is Not*, quoted at AM VII 65 (= DK82B3): Gorgias “sets up three main points one after the other: first, that there is nothing; second that even if there is [something], it is not apprehensible by a human being; third, that even if it is apprehensible, it is

a powerful refutation of a dogmatic thesis by hypothetically endorsing some of the Dogmatist's principles. So, even though the accumulation of arguments is not logically necessary, it permits one to take into account the diversity of the dogmatism Sextus is in contention with. Therefore, even though Sextus is concerned with brevity, he cannot restrict himself to the principle that to every account there is an equal counter-account. He needs to show in addition that such an equal counter-account does exist by showing the diversity and the disagreement of the philosophical theses.

This necessity introduces the last characteristic of Sextus' style: the production of a history of dogmatism. The use of ἱστορία is complex in Sextus' extant works. First, it is connected with the criticism of grammatical history in *Against the Grammarians*. According to Sextus, grammatical history is not an art and requires no technical ability. Besides, this kind of history is not a science which gives any guarantee: "individual histories are both infinite because of their number and not fixed, because the same facts are not attested about the same person by all parties" (*AM* I 260).

But we have already seen that Sextus also uses the term ἱστορία (more precisely the adverb ἱστορικῶς) to refer to the subjective style. Such a reference to ἱστορία has to be connected with medical Empiricism, which used the term to define one of its main methodological principles.<sup>88</sup> In this medical context, "history" denotes a *case history*, a report to other physicians of the occurrence of a disease in a single patient. Barbara Cassin has expressed some doubts about the possibility of connecting both practices of ἱστορία.<sup>89</sup> According to her, a physician's history cannot give the immediacy the Skeptic is looking for, because a physician's history is always transmitted by a story or a narration. In addition, the Galenic tradition has shown that a physician's history could be true or

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still not expressible or explainable to the next person." For a Skeptical application of this strategy, see the concatenation of the first four modes of Aenesidemus at *PH* I 79, 91, and 100.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Galen, *Subfiguratio empirica* chap. VIII: τινὲς μὲν γὰρ τὴν ἱστορίαν εἶναι φασὶν ἀπαγγελίαν τῶν ὀφθέντων, τινὲς δὲ προστιθέντες τὸ ἐναργῶς τὴν ἱστορίαν φασὶν ἀπαγγελίαν εἶναι τῶν ἐναργῶς φαινομένων, ἄλλοι δὲ ἀπαγγελίαν τῆς αὐτοψίας ἔφησαν εἶναι αὐτήν (65–66 in Deichgräber's Greek retroversion); *De Sectis* chap. II (Kühn I 67), *De Optima doctrina* (K. I 143–144). See Deichgräber (1965), 298 ff.; Frede (1987), 249–250; Stok (1993), 605.

<sup>89</sup> Cassin (1990), 133.



false, whereas the Skeptic's historical discourse is supposed to be neither true nor false.<sup>90</sup> These objections are perhaps relevant against Skepticism; but they do not exclude the possibility that Sextus is referring to the Empirical physician's conception of ἰστορία. In fact, those objections are from schools which criticized either the Skeptical or the Empirical endeavor, and perhaps both at once. Indeed, in both traditions the reference to ἰστορία expresses a desire for immediacy which is perhaps a bit illusory. For, like the Empirical physician, when the Skeptic writes "what is apparent" to him, no matter what he says, his history is *prima facie* a "discourse about what is apparent (τὸ περὶ τοῦ φαινομένου λεγόμενον)." This is the reason why Sextus has to fashion a style which allows him to draw a distinction between the Dogmatist's and the Skeptic's way of speaking and writing; and it is likely that the Empirical tradition had to do likewise. A similar reply applies to the Galenic objection used by Cassin. It is true that the Skeptical discourse, being a discourse, can, in a certain way, be interpreted as true or false. We can always presume that the Skeptic is not describing his own affection but is lying. However, this means that we judge his discourse by using a moral norm rather than an epistemic one.<sup>91</sup> The only norm we can use to judge it is his authenticity: does the Skeptic lie when he says that for him things appear a given way? And it is the same norm we can use to judge the Empirical history: is the physician who says that he saw such a disease or such a reaction telling the truth, i.e., is he really describing a case that he has seen? In addition, if an Empirical physician gives only a narration of bodily symptoms, or describes the relation between two bodily phenomena—like the scar and the wound—the description may be limited to an evident relation. This sort of description can be understood in light of what Sextus calls "commemorative signs" (*PH* II 102). As the Skeptic is describing something that he is thinking, he is always exposed to the difficulty of having to present his thought as a phenomenon, although he recognizes that "the intellect is the most unclear part of the soul" (*PH* II 32). Be that as it may,

<sup>90</sup> Pseudo-Galen, *On the Best Medical School*, chap. XIV, Deich. fr. 59, 127.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Spinelli (2005c), 119: "Ciò che si può escludere immediatamente è qualsiasi possibile identificazione delle *apophaseis* o *phonai* scettiche con quel *logos apophantikos* di cui parla Aristotele (cf. soprattutto il cap. 4 del *Del interpretatione*). Quest'ultimo è infatti un'enunciazione dotata e dotabile di un valore di verità o falsità (cfr. Ad es. *De int.* 5, 17a2–3). Le 'voci' sestane, invece, sembrano semmai essere più vicine a quei discorsi che lo stesso Aristotele definisce semplicemente 'semantici', capaci sì di significare, ma né veri né falsi: ad. es. la preghiera, la domanda, l'esortazione e altri 'atti linguistici'."

it seems that this Skeptical use of *ιστορία* is borrowed from the Empirical corpus, and Sextus' aim of speaking *ιστορικῶς* seems to be an attempt to adapt such an ambition to philosophy.

There remains a third use of *history* which is related to Sextus' own method. Even though he rarely employs the term *ιστορία* to characterize his historical writings, it is difficult to avoid the term.<sup>92</sup> Until recently, Sextus was considered more of a doxographer than a philosopher, his main interest consisting more in the historical information he gives about ancient philosophy than in his own philosophical stance. However, it is easy to see that the two characteristics cannot be so easily separated and that the fact that Sextus renders a history of philosophy is entirely related to his philosophical agenda. Of course, Sextus is neither Aristotle nor Hegel. But his purpose is precisely to show that philosophy—at least its main part, the dogmatic one—has no sense, to show that dogmatism, if it is studied from the point of view of the disagreements between dogmatic theories, leads to Skepticism. That is the reason why the specific account of Skepticism, devoted to arguing “against each of the parts of what they [*sc.* Dogmatists] call philosophy” includes a great part of history of philosophy. To produce equipollence, it is sufficient either to oppose to a dogmatic thesis an opposite thesis and to show that the dispute is undecidable, or to show that an analysis of the criticized thesis leads to *ἀπορία*. The description of history as a *Kampfplatz* has a highly Skeptical utility: it vividly shows, in a kind of rhetorical *ὑποτύπωσης*, the senselessness of the history of philosophy.<sup>93</sup> A historical account of philosophy is the only way to show the variability of philosophy itself. Hence, if Sextus' style is historical, it is not only because he speaks like a “reporter” of his own affections. It is also because he is engaged in describing the history of philosophical disagreements.

This structure can be observed throughout the “special part” of Sextus' work, namely in *PH* II–III, in *AM* VII–XI, and even in *AM* I–VI. The case of *AM* VII–XI is the most obvious one. In the *proemium* of the first book of *Against the Logicians*, Sextus expounds the meaning of the “special part” of the Skeptical discourse. “Philosophy,” as he says,

<sup>92</sup> Cf. *AM* VII 141: *περὶ τοῦ κριτηρίου τῆς ἀληθείας ἱστορία*; 190: *τῆς Ἀκαδημαϊκῆς ἱστορίας*; VIII 1: *τὴν ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τῶν φυσικῶν μέχρι τῶν νεωτέρων καταγομένην ἱστορίαν*; 14: *τῆς κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον ἱστορίας*.

<sup>93</sup> Timon already inserted a *λογομαχία* in his *Silloi*, cf. Wachsmuth (1885), 44–46; Diels (1901), 183; Clayman (2009), 94–101.

“is a complex thing” (ποικίλον τι χεῖμα φιλοσοφία, *AM* VI 2), which is why the Skeptical history of philosophy is not a linear one, nor an exhaustive one. If Skeptical ἱστορία makes any sense, its goal would be to present methodically all the reasons that we have to doubt the reliability of philosophy. Hence, the Skeptical history of philosophy does not follow a chronological order; its order is mostly logical and follows the logic of opposition or equipollence. Sextus is writing as a musician writes, not a symphony, but a diaphony, or a cacophony, which should lead to Skeptical silence.

This peculiarity of Skepticism has a consequence which is emphasized by Sextus himself: to be a Pyrrhonian, one should have a solid philosophical culture in order to contradict one's adversary.<sup>94</sup> This kind of philosophical culture was probably already in the program of the New Academy's curriculum:<sup>95</sup> argumentation *in utramque partem* presupposes knowing and being able to develop a philosophical point of view on each side of a discussion. The physician model used by Sextus at *PH* III 280, where he describes how the “Skeptics propound arguments which differ in strength,” puts the Skeptic in a similar situation. To produce equipollence he has to put forward a counter-argument as strong as his opponent's argument. In such a situation, the Skeptic has to be able to refute any thesis, whether weak or strong, defended by the Dogmatist.<sup>96</sup> For this reason Sextus' work is a veritable patchwork of arguments, a *collage* of positions and theses which are not held by the person who is writing this history. This does not mean that Sextus has no style, but that his style is also made of the exogenous materials he is organizing.<sup>97</sup>

This characteristic can also explain some of the incoherence within the kind of Skepticism Sextus is using, namely, the coexistence of a rustic and an urbane form of Skepticism.<sup>98</sup> For example, it seems natural that

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *AM* I 5. As Emidio Spinelli has suggested to me, this Skeptical quality can be linked with the μεγαλοφρεῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων mentioned by Sextus at *PH* I 12.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *DL* IV 42.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Barnes (1988), 76.

<sup>97</sup> In the field of the arts, Sextus' style of writing could perhaps be compared to Karl Kraus' *Last Days of Mankind* or to the third movement of Berio's *Sinfonia*.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Barnes (1990), 2618: “The rustic Pyrrhonist has no beliefs whatsoever: he directs ἐποχή towards every issue that may arise. The second type of Scepticism I shall call urbane Pyrrhonism. The urbane Pyrrhonist is happy to believe most of the things that ordinary people assent to in the ordinary course of events: he directs ἐποχή towards a specific

Sextus does not use the same kind of arguments in the case of *AM* I–VI, simply because the dogmatism in discussion is not the same. In *PH* and *AM* VII–XI Sextus is fighting against philosophical dogmatism, which seems to be the worst form of dogmatism for him insofar as he promotes an *aphilosophical* life. His arguments and refutation have to be violent and radical, they need a kind of rustic Skepticism.<sup>99</sup> But for the arts (τέχναι) criticized in *AM* I–VI, the situation is different. These arts, even those criticized by Sextus, are not all theoretical and dogmatic. Sextus' criticisms are only directed against the desire to make a theory of these arts, since he regularly tries to exclude as a target the part of these arts which can be connected to daily life and natural reflection.<sup>100</sup> For this reason, in that treatise Sextus does “not want to appear to be Skeptical at every turn” (*AM* I 214). As a good doctor, Sextus has a plurality of styles. One of his goals is to induce ἐποχή, but he knows that this mainly depends on who he is talking to. For this reason, too, Sextus can make a distinction between two ways of refutation: at *AM* V 5 he remarks that there is a way which is “more dogmatic” (δογματικώτερον) and an way which is “more aporetic” (ἀπορητικώτερον). The more dogmatic way implies a thesis, for example in the case of music, that music is not necessary to be happy, which is a thesis assumed by an Epicurean like Philodemus or by Diogenes the Cynic. For its part, the more aporetic way destroys the musical art (*AM* VI 4–5).<sup>101</sup> Hence, in Sextus' work there is no “schizophrenia”<sup>102</sup> which could correspond to different phases of the history of Pyrrhonism or to different historical phases in Sextus' thought.<sup>103</sup> It is likely that this kind of analysis misses the point of Sextus' historical writing style. His style, connected to the fact that he is always arguing in a dialectical way, allows him to use different kinds of skepticism without any kind of schizophrenia. Being at the end of the

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target—roughly speaking, towards philosophical and scientific matters. Thus the rustics hotly reject everything, while the urbane coolly dismiss the rash claims of the *soi-disant* savants.”

<sup>99</sup> See for instance Agrippa's five modes at *PH* I 164–177.

<sup>100</sup> This is why Sextus accepts grammaticistic (“the general sort of expertise of writing and reading”, *AM* I 49), a certain kind of astronomy (*AM* V 1–2), even a certain kind of rhetoric (*AM* II 16–17), and a certain kind of music (*AM* VI 1). Cf. Fortuna (1986), Barnes (1988), 65, Spinelli (2000), 19 ff.

<sup>101</sup> See Philodemus, *On Music*, IV col. 152, 19–25 and, for the Cynics, *DL* VI 73.

<sup>102</sup> For the “schizophrenia” of Sextus, see Desbordes (1982), 55, Barnes (1988), 72–73, and Bett (2006).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Bett (1997), xiiff. For a critical analysis of this interpretation, see Annas (1999).

history of ancient Pyrrhonism, Sextus has at his disposal those different forms of skepticism and can use them depending on the dogmatic thesis he is targeting.

#### 4. *Conclusion*

The three aspects of Sextus' writing style which have been examined show that in his work we can find some elements inspired by Pyrrho's position on language and philosophical writing. However, he does not endorse Pyrrho's radical solution, nor Timon's original and pleasant way of writing, since his extant works show a very elaborate use of philosophical writing. To conclude, we can answer one of our first questions: why does Sextus write? Why does Sextus make the effort of composing a philosophical work when his aim is, in a way, to exit from philosophy or to return to the innocence of daily life and its intuitive way to pose and solve problems?<sup>104</sup> It seems that Sextus was aware of one problem: our natural tendency to dogmatize. Skepticism could not exist if dogmatism did not exist.<sup>105</sup> Skepticism does consciously need dogmatism; dogmatism is its reason to exist just as diseases are medicine's reason to exist. Therefore, the Skeptic's writings are linked to the temporal existence of the Dogmatist. Convinced by his own experience that he found happiness when he stopped believing dogmatic theses, the Skeptic wants to show the Dogmatists that they are increasing their own misfortune. By the narration of his own affect, Sextus tries to show the Dogmatists that another way of thinking is possible; by a methodical exposition of his argumentation and refutation he shows that his principle—equipollence—is efficient; by his Skeptical history of philosophy he gives a rich picture of the opposition of theses.

Regarding the question of the homogeneity of the Pyrrhonian tradition, what can we conclude about Sextus' writing style? Of course, Sextus has changed the relationship between the Pyrrhonian philosopher and philosophical discourse. He does not restrict himself to the aphasic position of Pyrrho. However, his sophisticated strategy of writing expresses something in common with Pyrrho: the aim to put an end

<sup>104</sup> On this aim, see Thorsrud (2003).

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *PH* I 12, 26–27, and *AM* I 6–7, where Sextus describes how a Skeptic is a disappointed Dogmatist.

to dogmatic discourse. So, on this matter, the difference between Pyrrho and neo-Pyrrhonism is that Sextus seems more conscious of the paradoxical fact that only discourse can put an end to discourse.<sup>106</sup>

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MODERATE ETHICAL REALISM  
IN SEXTUS' *AGAINST THE ETHICISTS*?

Diego E. Machuca

Several scholars familiar with Sextus Empiricus' Pyrrhonism who have attentively read his *Against the Ethicists* have gotten the impression that something strange is going on in this book.<sup>1</sup> For, at variance with the 'official' Pyrrhonian attitude of universal suspension of judgment, a number of passages of *AM XI* seem to ascribe to the Pyrrhonist both a type of negative dogmatism and a form of realism, which together amount to what may be called 'moderate ethical realism'. The purpose of this paper is to determine whether Sextus does embrace such a position in *AM XI*.<sup>2</sup>

I will begin by examining Sextus' treatment of the ethical part of philosophy not only in *AM XI* but also in the ethical section of the third book of the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism (PH)*. This will allow us to identify the type of ethical realism Sextus seems to espouse in *AM XI*. I will then present the views of the scholars who have examined the skepticism defended in this book, focusing on Richard Bett's interpretation because it is the most original, thorough, and controversial. Next, I will show that the tension between negative dogmatism and agnostic skepticism in *AM XI* is much stronger than Bett claims, and will discuss some problematic implications of his interpretation. I will then argue at length that

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<sup>1</sup> Although *Against the Ethicists* is the fifth and last extant book of what we call *Adversus Dogmaticos (AD)*, scholars commonly refer to it as *Adversus Mathematicos (AM)* XI. The reason *AD I–V* started to be designated as *AM VII–XI* is that, in our manuscripts, it is attached to the six books of *AM*. To maintain consistency with the other papers of the volume, I will adopt the conventional designation *AM VII–XI*. Finally, let us note that the real title of *AD* was probably *Pyrrhonian* or *Skeptical Commentaries* (Πυρρώνεια/Σκεπτικὰ Ὑπομνήματα) (see Machuca 2008, 33–34).

<sup>2</sup> When talking about the 'Pyrrhonist' or 'Skeptic' (with a capital 'S'), I will be specifically referring to the Pyrrhonist as depicted in Sextus' surviving writings. I will not be concerned with the outlooks of earlier Pyrrhonists. Following Sextus, I use 'Dogmatist' to refer to anyone who makes positive or negative assertions about how things really are on the basis of what he considers to be evidence and rational arguments.

there is no real reason for affirming that Sextus embraces in that book a form of ethical realism. Finally, I will sum up the main points of my interpretation of the skepticism of *AM* XI.

## I

What the Dogmatists call the “ethical” part of philosophy deals with the distinction among good, bad, and indifferent things (*PH* III 168, *AM* XI 2). These are not to be understood solely in the sense of what is deemed to be good, bad, or indifferent from a moral standpoint, but more generally in the sense of what is the object of a value judgment. This is why Sextus discusses, e.g., the disagreement about whether life and death are good or bad (*PH* III 229–232). In keeping with the definition of Skepticism found at *PH* I 8, Sextus sets out oppositions among ethical positions in order to see whether any one of them appears more persuasive or credible than the others. In the Sextan texts, we find three kinds of unresolved disagreements: (i) about the definitions of the good, the bad, and the indifferent (*PH* III 169–178, *AM* XI 22–41), (ii) about what things are to be called good, bad, or indifferent (*PH* III 179–234, *AM* XI 42–109; see also *PH* I 148–162), and (iii) about the existence of anything good, bad, or indifferent. Although Sextus does not explicitly mention disagreement (iii), the parties to disagreements (i) and (ii) believe that there exist things which are good, bad, or indifferent, whereas he expounds arguments that deny that anything is good, bad, or indifferent.<sup>3</sup> Now, we should not assume that Sextus himself endorses these negative arguments, for his purpose is rather to advance negative arguments in order to counterbalance the positive arguments put forward by his dogmatic rivals, thereby inducing suspension of judgment. This is the picture we get from the ethical section of *PH* III, since although Sextus expounds several arguments against there being anything good, bad, or indifferent by nature (*PH* III 179–197), he makes it clear that he is merely reporting arguments which he does not endorse. Indeed, after presenting the disagreement about the definitions of the good, the bad, and the indifferent, and before expounding the negative arguments, he observes:

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Sextus does not always include the indifferent in his discussion.

It is plain, therefore, that they [sc. the Dogmatists] did not put us on to the notion of each of the aforementioned things. But they have not experienced anything unlikely, since they err in things which are perhaps nonexistent (ἐν ἀνυποστάτοις τάχα πράγμασι). For that nothing is good, bad, or indifferent by nature some (τινές) conclude as follows.<sup>4</sup>  
(*PH* III 178)

The first point to note is that Sextus ascribes the negative arguments he is about to lay out to some anonymous people. Most of the time he employs the pronoun τινές (as he also does with ἔνιοι) to refer to people who do not seem to be Skeptics.<sup>5</sup> In some of the passages in which he makes use of τινές, this pronoun refers to individuals who put forward arguments leading to negative conclusions regarding the matters under consideration, and it seems clear that these people cannot be Pyrrhonists. The reason is that, in the course of his discussion of some of those matters and others, Sextus sometimes explicitly warns us that the Pyrrhonists subscribe to neither side of the dispute and suspend judgment.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, even if in some of the passages in question the individuals referred to by τινές are indeed Pyrrhonists, Sextus' warnings indicate that the arguments they put forward are dialectical and, hence, that the Pyrrhonists are not committed to their conclusions.<sup>7</sup> Or, at the very least, they indicate that, unlike some of his fellow Pyrrhonists, Sextus himself makes a merely dialectical use of those negative arguments.<sup>8</sup> Be that

<sup>4</sup> Translations from the Greek are my own, but I have consulted Annas and Barnes (2000), Bett (1997, 2005), Bury (1933–1949), Mates (1996), and Spinelli (1995).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., *PH* I 13, 188, 215, 220, 236, II 214, III 16, 38, 39, 72, 75, 102, 106, 115, 116, 140, 183, 192, 218; *AM* VII 38, 424, VIII 32, 137, 157, 171, 258, 281, 317, IX 105, 170, XI 7, 30. Two clear exceptions are *PH* I 180 and 204. A couple of times (*PH* I 30, 189) Sextus uses the expression τινές τῶν σκεπτικῶν to talk about the Skeptics (cf. Ioppolo 1994, 91).

<sup>6</sup> E.g., *PH* III 11, 81, 82, 135, 139–140; *AM* VIII 298, IX 137, 191–192.

<sup>7</sup> I use 'dialectical argument' to designate any argument used by the Pyrrhonist merely for polemical purposes, i.e., not because he endorses it, but only because it allows him to shake the Dogmatists' confidence in the correctness of their positions. An *ad hominem* argument is a type of dialectical argument, namely, an argument whose premises are accepted only by the Dogmatists against whom the Pyrrhonist is arguing, so that the unwelcome conclusions that follow from those premises impose themselves only upon the Dogmatists. But a dialectical argument may also refer either to an argument of a dogmatic school used by the Pyrrhonist to oppose an argument of another dogmatic school, or to an argument constructed by the Pyrrhonist himself with the sole aim of opposing an argument advanced by a given Dogmatist. In neither case is the Dogmatist addressed by the argument compelled to accept its conclusion, but the Pyrrhonist's sole purpose is to set out an opposition between arguments in order to show their apparent equal force or equipollence (ἰσοσθένεια).

<sup>8</sup> Fernanda Decleva Caizzi (1992, 297 n. 43) claims that, in passages such as *AM*

as it may, in the present case, it is plain that he does not endorse the conclusions of the negative arguments he is about to expound since he uses the adverb *τάχα*, which expresses the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgment (see *PH* I 194–195). Sextus thus makes it clear that he suspends judgment about whether there exists anything good, bad, or indifferent by nature. The same suspensive attitude is clearly expressed in another key passage of *PH* III:

The Skeptic, then, seeing such anomaly among things, suspends judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad or, in general, to be done or not to be done, here too abstaining from dogmatic rashness; and he follows without opinions (*ἀδοξάστως*) the observance of everyday life.

(*PH* III 235)

Besides explicitly saying that the Pyrrhonist suspends his judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad, Sextus talks about the observance of everyday life. This refers to the various ways things appear to the Skeptic, *τὸ φαινόμενον* being his criterion of action (*PH* I 21–24). The use of the term *ἀδοξάστως* precisely indicates that the Skeptic refrains from making assertions about what things are really like, contenting himself instead with reporting how they appear to him.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Sextus concludes his exposition of the Tenth Mode of Aenesidemus, which especially bears on ethics, by observing that we must suspend judgment about the nature of things, limiting ourselves instead to saying how they appear (*PH* I 163).

At *AM* XI 69–98, we find four arguments that purport to show that nothing is by nature good or bad, which with some differences parallel those found in *PH* III. But in *AM* XI Sextus does not make a remark similar to the one made at *PH* III 178. Rather, at *AM* XI 68 he seems to ascribe to the Skeptics the arguments expounded at *AM* XI 69–98 when he says that “it will next be necessary to apply oneself to the things said by the Skeptics about the matter under discussion.” Also, at *AM* XI 110 Sextus observes: “We have, then, sufficiently inquired into nothing being good or bad by nature,” which could be interpreted in the sense that he has proven the nonexistence of anything good or bad

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VIII 32 and 171, *τινές* refers to Skeptics who adopted a particular position within the Skeptical school. She also mentions *PH* III 183, but nothing in this passage indicates that *τινές* could possibly refer to Skeptics.

<sup>9</sup> For the term *ἀδοξάστως*, see also *PH* I 231, 240; II 102, 246, 254, 258; III 2, 151. For the sense of this word, see Barnes (1990), n. 113 and Fine (2000), n. 65.

by nature. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the fact that a Skeptic expounds negative arguments in his investigation is not by itself problematic. For, in order to attain a state of equipollence, he may use both negative arguments propounded by Dogmatists and negative arguments which he himself has thought of in order to counter positive dogmatic arguments. In several passages in his extant corpus, Sextus explicitly cautions us that, when he puts forward arguments yielding negative conclusions, his intention is not to induce us to give our assent to them. Rather, his intention is to show that such arguments appear to be equal in force to their rivals, so we will have to suspend judgment about the truth of the theses that those conflicting arguments purport to establish.<sup>10</sup> The fact that some of those passages belong to the other four extant books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* in principle licenses us to apply the same caveat to *AM XI*.<sup>11</sup> If so, we can argue that, given the predominance among philosophers and non-philosophers alike of the belief that things are by nature good or bad, Sextus only needs to focus on advancing arguments to the effect that nothing is by nature good or bad in order to counterbalance that belief and induce the Dogmatists to suspend judgment.<sup>12</sup> This kind of procedure is explicitly described by Sextus at *AM VII* 443 as that followed by the Pyrrhonist.

It is also possible that at least some of the negative arguments found in *AM XI* are *ad hominem*. The first of these arguments (*AM XI* 69–78), which is the main argument to the effect that nothing is by nature good or bad, uses as one of its premises the following principle: if  $x$  is by nature  $F$ , then  $x$  must be  $F$  for, or in relation to, everyone and not merely for, or in relation to, some people:

If, then, there exists anything by nature good and if there exists anything by nature bad, this ought to be common to everyone and be good or bad for everyone (κοινὸν εἶναι πάντων καὶ πᾶσιν ὑπάρχειν ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακόν). For just as fire, being by nature warming, warms everyone but does not warm some and chills others, and in the same way as snow which chills by

<sup>10</sup> See *PH II* 79, 103; *AM VII* 443–444, *VIII* 159–160, 476–477. Cf. *PH II* 130, 133, 192, *III* 81, 82, 135, 139–140; *AM VIII* 298, 327–328, *IX* 206–207.

<sup>11</sup> For the hypothesis that the five books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* are the extant parts of a larger work, see Janáček (1963); also Blomqvist (1974) and Machuca (2008a), 31–35.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. McPherran (1989), 324 n. 75, and (1990), 132, 134–135; Hankinson (1994), 66, and (1998), 271. Cf. also Spinelli (1995), 240–241, who nonetheless elsewhere (297, 311) seems to think that Sextus does deny ethical realism.

nature does not chill some but warms others, but chills all alike, so too what is by nature good ought to be good for everyone and not good for some but not good for others. (...) So that if there exists anything by nature good, this is good in relation to everyone (πρὸς ἅπαντας), and if there exists anything by nature bad, this is bad in relation to everyone. But nothing good or bad is common to everyone, as we will establish; therefore, there exists nothing by nature good or bad. (AM XI 69, 71)

With variants, the absolutist principle in question (hereafter Π) is also found in the argument at AM XI 96–98 and in most of the negative arguments expounded in PH III: if *x* is by nature *F*, everyone would regard *x* as *F*, or everyone would be equally disposed towards *x*, or *x* would move everyone in the same way, i.e., would have the same effect on everyone (see also AM I 147).<sup>13</sup> Now, it is probable that this principle, which plays an important part in the ancient Pyrrhonian argumentation,<sup>14</sup> is used because it is endorsed by the Skeptic's dogmatic rivals.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, we find versions of Π in, e.g., Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1134b18–1135a6), in Polystratus (*On Irrational Contempt* 23, 26–25, 15), and in Galen (*On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 9.1.11, 9.7.5); and Diogenes Laertius ascribes a similar idea to the Stoics (DL VII 103). It may be argued, however, that at the end of the quoted passage Sextus says that the fact that nothing good or bad is common to all is something that he himself will establish (παράσῃσομεν). But this is not really problematic, since many times he does express himself this way

<sup>13</sup> For the purpose of the present paper, the differences and relations among these variants are not important. For some discussion of this, see Svavarsson (2004), 253–255.

<sup>14</sup> Scholars have referred to this principle when discussing the skeptical outlooks of Pyrrho, Aenesidemus, and Sextus: Striker in her essay on the Ten Modes (1996b, 121, 125–126, 128–129); Woodruff in his study of Aenesidemus' Pyrrhonism (1988, 150–153) and in his discussion of the Ten Modes (2010, 216–219); Hankinson in his analysis of Sextus' attack on the notion of causality (1988, 243) and on the ethical part of philosophy (1994, 62–63; 1998, 268–270), as well as in his exposition of the Ten Modes (1998, 159) and of Aenesidemus' skepticism (1998, 129); Svavarsson (2004, 250–258) in his analysis of Pyrrho's thought; Polito (2004, 75–87) and Schofield (2007, 305–313) in their studies of Aenesidemus' so-called Heracliteanism.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. McPherran (1990), 133–134; Svavarsson (2002), 253 n. 27, (2004), 249, 252, 257, 268, 286, (2010), 55, 57 n. 42. Cf. also Decleva Caizzi (1996), 43–44, who nonetheless, focusing her analysis on the claim that “fire warms by nature” (AM XI 69, AM I 147), prefers to interpret the notion of φύσις so as to make it compatible with the Skeptical stance. In her view, that notion merely refers to a phenomenological uniformity (1996, 47–52). It is however plain that, when Sextus talks about *x* being *F* φύσει, he is referring to what *x* is really like and not merely to the way it appears.



when arguing dialectically.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in three other passages from *AM* XI (188, 210, and 239), he uses the same verb and the argumentation also seems to be dialectical.

In addition, there are two passages from *AM* XI itself that make it clear that principle *Π* is held by at least some Dogmatists. The first is found at *AM* XI 64–67, where Sextus reports the third-century BC Stoic Aristo of Chios' rejection of the Stoic doctrine which draws a distinction within the class of the indifferent things. According to Aristo, it is not the case that

some of the [indifferent things] are preferred and some dispreferred by nature, but [only] in virtue of the different circumstances of the [various] occasions, [so that] neither do so-called preferred things turn out to be at all times (πάντως) preferred, nor are so-called dispreferred things necessarily dispreferred. (*AM* XI 65)

Hence, “in the things between virtue and vice there is no natural precedence of some over the others, but rather [a precedence] according to the circumstances” (*AM* XI 67). Sextus thus ascribes principle *Π* to a Dogmatist who uses it to attack a given doctrine. It is worth noting that the same argument against the Stoic doctrine of the indifferents is ascribed to τινές at *PH* III 192, which may be taken as partial confirmation that the anonymous people who in *PH* III endorse principle *Π* are non-Skeptics.

As for the second passage, after observing that what is by nature good or bad is common to all and using the warming action of fire to illustrate this point, Sextus remarks that Plato argued from similar cases in trying to establish that god is by nature good (*AM* XI 70; cf. *Republic* I 335d, II 379b). Here again Sextus explicitly attributes the absolutist principle *Π* to a Dogmatist.

It is finally worth noting that Sextus employs principle *Π* in the course of his exposition of one of the arguments directed against the existence of a cause at *AM* IX 237–245. He points out that, if a cause by nature produces an effect by itself and by its own power, it must produce it always and not only sometimes, since it possesses its own nature continuously (*AM* IX 238). In the case of fire, given that it burns some things and not others, “it does not burn by itself and using its own nature” (*AM* IX 242, cf. *AM* VIII 198–199). In this passage, *Π* is formulated in terms of causality: if an object possesses by nature a property that produces a

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *PH* II 21, III 85, 158, 266; *AM* VII 78, 263, 364, VIII 17, 37, 391, IX 210, 227, 232, 246, 252, 309, 345, 376, X 189; *AM* I 10, 19, II 10, 26, 110, III 30, 44, VI 59, 61.

given effect, then it must produce the same effect always, independently of the circumstances. At *AM* XI 69 and at *PH* III 179 and 182, the principle is formulated in very similar terms. In general, in the arguments that use  $\Pi$ , the notion of φύσις takes on a causal sense.<sup>17</sup> Now, it is clear that in the passage of *AM* IX under consideration Sextus is arguing dialectically, and for two reasons. First, at *AM* IX 195 he points out that “among those who inquired about [the general conception of cause], some declared that a cause of something exists, some that it does not exist, and some that it is no more existent than nonexistent.” The third outlook is the one adopted by the Skeptics. Second, after expounding at *AM* IX 196–206 the arguments in favor of the existence of a cause, Sextus observes that he will consider “the arguments of the Aporetics, for these will appear both equipollent to those expounded [by the Dogmatists] and not differing from them as regards persuasion (πειθοῦς)” (*AM* IX 207). These two points make it clear that Sextus’ intention is not to prove the nonexistence of causes, but to show that the arguments pro and contra their existence appear equipollent or equally persuasive. Therefore, the negative argument expounded at *AM* IX 237–245 is used by Sextus with the sole aim of counterbalancing the widespread belief in the existence of causes. This proves that the absolutist principle  $\Pi$  used at *AM* IX 238 and 242 is not endorsed by Sextus. Now, if in the third book of *Adversus Dogmaticos* he does not adhere to  $\Pi$ , but only uses it because it permits him to construct a negative argument to counter an argument in favor of the existence of a cause, then one can reasonably infer that neither does he adhere to  $\Pi$  in the fifth book of the same work. If this is so, then Sextus does not embrace the conclusion of the negative ethical arguments which make use of that principle.

In sum, it seems that the Skeptic’s use of principle  $\Pi$ , and hence of the arguments based upon it, should be considered *ad hominem* or dialectical in general. That is to say, Sextus seems to use that principle either because it is accepted by at least some of his dogmatic rivals or, when this is not the case, because it allows him to construct negative arguments which appear as persuasive as the positive arguments he is examining, thereby attaining a state of equipollence.

There are, however, passages from *AM* XI in which Sextus seems to adopt *in propria persona* the view that nothing is by nature good or bad.

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<sup>17</sup> See Hankinson (1988), 243, (1994), 62, and (1998), 269. Cf. Svavarsson (2004), 253, 264.

The first passage to be considered is found at *AM XI* 114, where Sextus presents three alternatives: either everything anyone deems to be good or bad is such by nature, or only a certain one of the things deemed good is good and a certain one of the things deemed bad is bad, or these things depend on their

being somehow in relation to something (ἐν τῷ πρὸς τί πως ἔχειν), and in relation to this person this thing is to be chosen or to be avoided, but in relation to the nature of things it is neither to be chosen nor to be avoided, but at one time to be chosen and at another to be avoided.

In talking about what is to be chosen or avoided, Sextus refers to what is to be regarded as good or bad. Now, we appear to obtain confirmation of the Skeptic's adoption of the third view from the fact that, after referring to the first two, Sextus points out that the third view is the one which leads to undisturbedness (ἀταραξία) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία), which are the states the Skeptic purports to have attained:

If someone were to say that nothing is by nature more to be chosen than to be avoided, or more to be avoided than to be chosen (since each thing which occurs is somehow in relation to something and, according to differing times and circumstances, turns out (καθεστῶτος) at one time to be chosen and at another to be avoided), he will live happily and undisturbedly. (...) This will be at his disposal from his holding the opinion that nothing is by nature good or bad (τοῦτο μὴν αὐτῷ παρέσται ἐκ τοῦ μηδὲν φύσει ἀγαθὸν ἢ κακὸν δοξάζειν). Hence, it is not possible to live happily if one supposes that some things are by nature good or bad.  
(*AM XI* 118)

According to this passage, the Skeptic seems to hold three opinions which are at variance with a thoroughgoing ἐποχή: (i) nothing is by nature (i.e., invariably) good or bad (cf. *AM XI* 130, 140, 185), (ii) something can be deemed to be good or bad only in relation to certain variables, i.e., relative to particular moments and circumstances, and (iii) the attainment of ἀταραξία and εὐδαιμονία is possible thanks to the holding of (i) and (ii) (cf. *AM XI* 130, 140). If the Skeptic of *AM XI* does hold opinions (i) and (ii), then he embraces a type of ethical realism which rejects ethical absolutism but accepts that objects, actions, or states may be objectively good or bad depending on the context or the circumstances. That is to say, the form of realism in question rejects the absolutist view according to which that which is good or bad is such always, without exception, or regardless of the circumstances. But it accepts the weaker view according to which something can be deemed to be objectively good or bad only in relation to a particular context or situation. For

instance, in a given circumstance, only one action is really right or wrong and anyone reasoning correctly and with all the relevant information would judge, regardless of his society or culture, that the action is such. I call this view, sometimes referred to as 'situational' ethics, 'moderate ethical realism'. Now, if in *AM XI* Sextus does adopt such a metaethical position, then in that book he cannot be considered a 'skeptic' either in the official Pyrrhonian sense—because he does not suspend judgment about the truth of ethical absolutism and moderate ethical realism—or in the usual modern sense—because he does not endorse ethical anti-realism, i.e., does not deny the existence of objective moral properties or facts.<sup>18</sup>

Before concluding this presentation of the position Sextus seems to adopt in *AM XI*, it is worth noting that there is another possible translation of the penultimate sentence of *AM XI* 118. Emidio Spinelli translates it with the sense that the Skeptic will have a happy and undisturbed life because of not holding the opinion that anything is by nature good or bad.<sup>19</sup> This translation has of course the advantage that the sentence may be read in the sense that the Skeptic suspends judgment about anything's being good or bad by nature. However, it may also be read in the sense that the Skeptic denies that anything is good or bad by nature. For the proposition "S does not hold the opinion that *x* is by nature *F*" is compatible with both "S suspends judgment about whether *x* is by nature *F*" and "S denies that *x* is by nature *F*." For instance, the reason for my saying "I do not hold the opinion that abortion is by nature bad" may be either my ignorance about whether it is by nature bad or my belief that it is not by nature bad. Now, the second reading of the sentence in question is compatible with my translation and is to be preferred because it is in agreement with the claim made in the first sentence of the quoted passage to the effect that nothing is by nature (i.e., invariably) more to be chosen than to be avoided and vice versa, which seems to be a clear denial of ethical absolutism. In addition, there are other passages in which Sextus seems to assert *in propria persona* that nothing is by nature good or bad

<sup>18</sup> Ethical anti-realism is the position typically embraced by contemporary ethical skeptics. Varieties of this position are John Mackie's moral error theory (Mackie 1977), Ian Hinckfuss' moral nihilism (Hinckfuss 1987), Richard Joyce's and Mark Kalderon's versions of moral fictionalism (Joyce 2001, Kalderon 2005), John Burgess' 'anethicism' (Burgess 2010), and Richard Garner's moral abolitionism (Garner 2010).

<sup>19</sup> "Ciò è in suo potere in virtù del fatto che non opina esser qualcosa per natura bene o male" (1995, 75). Cf. Hankinson (1994), 56–57 and Bett (1997), 137.

(*AM XI* 130, 140), that good and bad things do not exist (*AM XI* 185), and that it is the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad which makes it possible to attain undisturbedness and happiness (*AM XI* 140).

## II

The specialists who have noticed the problems posed by *AM XI* have basically adopted either of two views. Some have maintained that, in the end, it is possible to reconcile the type of skepticism expounded in *AM XI* with the Pyrrhonism defended in *PH*.<sup>20</sup> Others, by contrast, have argued that the skeptical stance of *AM XI* is problematic because it is incompatible with the official Pyrrhonian attitude expounded in *PH*.<sup>21</sup> Richard Bett has rejected both interpretations because the skepticism of *AM XI* does differ from that defended in *PH*, but there is no reason why it should not. He maintains that *AM XI* preserves a version of skepticism which predates the version found in *PH* and is consistent in its own terms. More precisely, Bett claims that *AM XI* is composed of two parts deriving from distinct sources corresponding to different phases of the Pyrrhonian tradition: part A comprises paragraphs 1–167 and part B paragraphs 168–257 (Bett 1997, xii–xiii). It is part A which differs from what we find in most of Sextus' extant corpus and which corresponds to the variety of skepticism which our sources ascribe to Aenesidemus.<sup>22</sup> This is why *AM XI* is, more than any other Sextan book, "a relic of a phase in the history of Pyrrhonism far earlier than Sextus himself" (Bett 1997, xxxii).

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<sup>20</sup> McPherran (1990), Annas (1993, 1998), Hankinson (1994), Nussbaum (1994), Laursen (2004), and Svavarsson (2004). Spinelli (1995) does not find any problems with the skepticism of *AM XI*.

<sup>21</sup> Annas and Barnes (1985) and Striker (1996b, 1996c).

<sup>22</sup> Bett contends that the skepticism found particularly in part A is in agreement with the skeptical stance found in two other ancient sources, namely, the summary of Aenesidemus' *Pyrrhonian Discourses* provided by Photius in his *Library* (169b18–170b35) and Diogenes' account of Pyrrhonism (Bett 1997, xix–xxii, 258–259; 2005, xxi–xxii). Although Woodruff (1988) proposes a reading very similar to Bett's, he does not mention any correspondence between Photius' summary and *AM XI* (see Bett 1994, 159 n. 58; 1997, xx n. 33). However, the relationship between the ethical skepticism of *AM XI* and Aenesidemus' skeptical outlook had already been suggested by Annas and Barnes (1985, 164). Cf. also Spinelli (1995), 210–211, 273. I should note that, in the present paper, I am not concerned with Aenesidemus' own form of skepticism or with its connection with the skepticism of *AM XI*.

According to Bett, the key difference between part A of *AM XI* and the ethical section of *PH III* consists in that, in the former, from (i) the mere disagreement about the good and the bad, and (ii) the requirement that for something to be by nature good or bad, it must be good or bad for everyone or in all circumstances, it is concluded that (iii) nothing is by nature good or bad, and that (iv) what is one or the other is always relative to people or circumstances. On the basis of the passages I have examined in the previous section, Bett affirms that the Skeptic of *AM XI* accepts conclusions (iii) and (iv) (1997, xiv). He calls requirement (ii) (which corresponds to our principle  $\Pi$ ) the “Universality Requirement” or “Invariability Condition”, and explains it as follows:

[A]n object is by nature *F* only if it is *F* *invariably* or *without qualification*. Thus an object which is *F* only sometimes, or for some people, is *thereby* not by nature *F*.<sup>23</sup> (2000, 196; cf. 1997, xiv)

Given this condition, the propositions that affirm that something is good or bad relative to certain persons or circumstances cannot be deemed to be assertions about the nature of things (1997, xiv). Bett also holds that, in *AM XI*, Sextus uses as synonyms the expressions φύσει, ταῖς ἀληθείαις, ὄντως, and τῷ ὄντι,<sup>24</sup> so that

in order for something to qualify as *in reality* good or bad ... it must be good or bad intrinsically (and hence, again, invariably). Thus the relativized assertions mentioned above not only fall outside the category of assertions about the nature of things; they also fall outside the category of assertions about how things really are.

(1997, xv; cf. 1994, 142–143, 145–146)

Concerning the relationship between parts A and B, Bett infers that they derive from different sources on the basis of several facts, among which are: (i) the issues addressed in the two parts have little in common; (ii) there are no cross-references between them, with the only exception of *AM XI* 185, which could in any case be deemed a later addition by Sextus; (iii) the two parts are connected clumsily; and (iv) the two parts employ different types of arguments (1997, xii–xiii). For instance, part B employs

<sup>23</sup> Roberto Polito thinks that Aenesidemus adheres to what Bett calls the “Universality Requirement” or “Invariability Condition” (see Polito 2004, 81–82, 86–88, 175). Polito even speaks of the “universality requirement” (76, 175) and the “requirements of agreement and invariability” (85, 88), but surprisingly makes no reference to Bett. Svavarsson (2004, 284–285), by contrast, claims that Aenesidemus’ use of principle  $\Pi$  is dialectical.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Svavarsson (2004), 251 n. 3.

arguments which correspond to some of the so-called Five Modes of Agrippa: at *AM* XI 173–177, 229 and 230, we find arguments that present the disagreements as unresolvable, and at *AM* XI 183 Sextus says that, regarding the notion of καταληπτική φαντασία, the Stoics fall into the reciprocal mode (even though he does not use this technical expression). It is therefore plausible that the source for part B belongs to a later phase of the Pyrrhonian tradition (1997, xxiii).<sup>25</sup>

Bett also supports his interpretation of the skepticism of *AM* XI with an analysis of the terminology employed in its two parts, A and B. First, the notion of ἰσοσθένεια is absent and the expression ἀνεπίκριτος διαφωνία only occurs in part B (*AM* XI 229 and 230). Second, the expressions μὴ μᾶλλον and οὐ μᾶλλον used at *AM* XI 118 and 147, respectively, do not express suspension of judgment but relativity: *x* is no more *F* than *G* because it is each one of them in specific circumstances. Third, Bett claims that one of the facts which support the view that *AM* VII–XI in general is earlier than *PH* is that the former gives a stronger impression of negative dogmatism than the latter.<sup>26</sup> For instance, the use in *AM* VII–XI of the verb ἀναγεῖν (do away with) to refer to the Skeptic's attitude towards the existence of certain things has no parallel in *PH*, but is found in several passages in Diogenes (DL IX 90, 94, 96–101) and is in agreement with Aenesidemus' type of skepticism (1997, xxix; 2005, xxii, xxiv). Bett recognizes, however, that in several passages of *AM* VII–X Sextus points out that the arguments he has put forward lead to suspension of judgment, so it is reasonable to suppose that, in *AM* VII–X, he expounds negative arguments in order to counterbalance the positive arguments advanced by the Dogmatists (1997, xxix). This is why Bett thinks that the adaptation of arguments of an Aenesideman origin to a later variety of Pyrrhonism would have been conducted more ineptly in *AM* VII–X than in *PH* (1997, xxx; cf. 2005, xxiii–xxiv). This said, it should be noted that he maintains that *PH* III contains elements of the earlier brand of skepticism which Sextus does not successfully

<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that Bett (2006) argues that Sextus' use in *AM* of negative arguments against the usefulness and the existence of the μαθήματα or liberal arts cannot be entirely accounted for by the Pyrrhonian practice of opposing positive and negative arguments in order to induce suspension of judgment. Rather, those arguments derive from a skeptical source which defends the same version of Pyrrhonism as the source for the negative arguments expounded in *AM* XI.

<sup>26</sup> Bett claims that *PH* III is the revised and improved version of *AM* XI (Bett 1997, xi, xxiv–xxviii, 257–271, 274–276), and reaches the same conclusion regarding the relationship between *PH* II and *AM* VII–VIII (Bett 2005, xxiv–xxx).

integrate to his own Pyrrhonian outlook. This is the reason why that book shows confusion and inconsistency (1994, 124–125, 154–156; 1997, 258–259).<sup>27</sup>

### III

Nowadays, students of Sextus are well aware of the fact that, in his extant corpus, different varieties of skepticism seem to coexist.<sup>28</sup> As Jonathan Barnes rightly observes, “A subtle reader can always, or almost always, explain away the anomalies which appear on the surface of most texts; but there is such a vice as oversubtlety, and it is a vice to which clever scholars are by temperament inclined” (2000, xv). Bearing this in mind, I still think it possible to *partially* mitigate the dogmatic look of *AM XI* without succumbing to such a vice or to an excessive use of the principle of charity.

I will begin my discussion by quoting a passage from what Bett calls part A of *AM XI*, in which Sextus seems to adopt an outlook similar to the one he defends in *PH*. Having mentioned the Dogmatists’ affirmation that believing in the existence of something that is by nature good or bad makes it possible to attain happiness (*AM XI* 110), Sextus tells us:

The Skeptics (οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως), neither affirming nor denying anything in vain (μηδὲν εἰκῇ τιθέντες ἢ ἀναιροῦντες), [but] subjecting all things to inquiry (τὴν σκέψιν), teach that for those who suppose something good or bad by nature there follows an unhappy life, whereas for those who make no determinations (ἀοριστοῦσι) and suspend judgment (ἐπέχουσι) “the easiest life is for humans” [*Odyssey* IV 565].

(*AM XI* 111)

We find here some key terms that Sextus usually employs when explaining the distinctive features of Pyrrhonism: the noun σκέψις and the verbs ἐπέχειν, ἀοριστεῖν, τιθέναι, and ἀναιρεῖν. At first glance, the very use of this terminology seems to indicate that the Pyrrhonism of *AM XI* does not differ from that of *PH*. However, the situation is more complex and requires a detailed analysis of the passage, beginning with the term σκέψις.

<sup>27</sup> For Bett’s interpretation of the peculiar form of skepticism of *AM XI*, see, besides Bett (1997), Bett (1994), (2000), ch. 4, (2005), xx–xxiv, (2006), 29–31, 33–34, and (2010b).

<sup>28</sup> For a presentation of the distinct forms of skepticism detectable in the Sextan corpus, see Machuca (2008a), sect. 3.



At *PH* I 8, σκέψις is defined as an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and things which are thought of, one of whose results is suspension of judgment. Hence, ἐποχή is intimately bound up with σκέψις. The same connection is found in the quoted passage, since οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς σκέψεως are those who, unlike the Dogmatists, inquire into everything and suspend judgment. One may therefore conclude that, at *AM* XI 111, Sextus is referring to those who possess the same ability explained at *PH* I 8. Note, in this respect, that at *AM* XI 152 the Skeptics are referred to with the expression οἱ ἐφεκτικοί, i.e., “those who suspend judgment.” Note also that in *AM* XI Sextus speaks of suspension of judgment about all things (*AM* XI 168), and refers to the Skeptic as the person who suspends judgment about everything (*AM* XI 144, 150) or about all matters concerning opinion (*AM* XI 160),<sup>29</sup> which would in principle invalidate any ascription of negative metaethical claims to the Skeptic himself. And this is so even though, as Bett claims (2010b, 184), there is no mention of suspension of judgment specifically in relation to the existence of anything good or bad by nature. At *AM* XI 140, however, Sextus says that the teaching that nothing is by nature good or bad is one peculiar to Skepticism, a claim that is at variance with a thoroughgoing ἐποχή. In addition, we saw that in some passages of *AM* XI he remarks that the states of ἀταραξία and εὐδαιμονία are attained thanks to the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad. But at *AM* XI 111 it is the adoption of ἐποχή which makes it possible for the Skeptic to lead the easiest life. In general, in *AM* XI there is a tension between the way in which the Skeptic is supposed to attain those two states. Besides *AM* XI 111, in other passages we are told that only those who suspend judgment about everything are able to live undisturbed and happy (*AM* XI 144, 160, cf. 150 and 168).

In sum, *AM* XI presents two interrelated tensions. First, the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about all things, but he also seems to hold the belief that nothing is by nature good or bad. Second, the attainment of ἀταραξία and εὐδαιμονία is said to be possible either through total suspension of judgment or through holding that negative belief. Bett is fully aware of this problem and, in order to avoid ascribing to Sextus a serious confusion, he claims that in *AM* XI the notion of ἐποχή has a weaker sense than in *PH*:

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<sup>29</sup> Τὸν περὶ πάντων ἐπέχοντα (144), ὁ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχων (150), τὴν περὶ πάντων ἐποχήν (168), οἱ περὶ πάντων ἐπέχων τῶν κατὰ δόξαν (160).

The sceptic of *M* XI suspends judgement in the sense that he neither issues nor commits himself to any assertions claiming to specify the nature of things. The denial that anything is by nature good or bad does not violate suspension of judgement in this sense (to deny that *X* is by nature good is not to assert that *X* is by nature *other than* good); nor do the assertions of relativized claims about good and bad (because, given the Universality Requirement, relativized claims are not claims about the nature of things).  
(1997, xviii; cf. 1994, 141–142; 2005, xxiii)

Thus, neither the negative arguments expounded in the third chapter of *AM* XI nor the relativized assertions found at *AM* XI 114 and 118 are incompatible with ἐποχή περὶ πάντων (Bett 1997, 138–139). Similarly, principle Π does not violate this type of suspension because meta-level claims “about necessary conditions for a thing’s being good are not themselves statements to the effect that some particular object or set of objects is by nature good, or by nature of any other character” (1997, xviii n. 29). Therefore, when at *AM* XI 111 Sextus says that the Skeptic makes no determinations and suspends judgment, what he is saying is that the Skeptic refrains from specifying the nature of things, which is incompatible neither with the denial of the existence of anything good or bad by nature nor with the affirmation that something is good or bad in relation to particular circumstances (Bett 1997, 141–142).

Now, even if one granted that the notion of ἐποχή presents such a difference in sense between *AM* XI and *PH*, Bett’s interpretation still faces a serious difficulty, namely, that in the other four extant books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* there are quite a few passages in which ἐποχή consists in refraining from affirming or denying the existence of the object under investigation.<sup>30</sup> Bett takes this difficulty into account and offers two possible explanations (1997, xxx–xxx). According to the first, the sources used to compose *AM* VII–X are different from those used to compose (part A of) *AM* XI, and one may suppose that the former sources started to adapt the Aenesideman type of skepticism to the later variety of Pyrrhonism, whereas the latter sources did not. Although this possibility cannot be ruled out, Bett thinks it “attributes to Sextus a depressingly low level of autonomy over, or comprehension of, what he was doing in this work” (1997, xxx). And although something similar happens with the two parts that make up *AM* XI, Bett argues that in this

<sup>30</sup> E.g., *AM* VII 380; VIII 118–119, 258, 298, 363, 380, 428, 477; IX 191, 194; X 6, 69, 168.

case the divergences are few. He therefore tentatively suggests a second explanation according to which the difference between *AM* VII–X and *AM* XI is to be accounted for by the fact that the situation the Skeptic finds in the fields of logic and physics is distinct from the situation he faces in the field of ethics:

the difference is due to the fact that, according to Sextus at this time (perhaps according to his immediate source or sources as well), certain questions about good and bad admit of far more definite answers than any questions in the areas of logic and physics. In the case of good and bad, therefore, the negative conclusions, stemming probably from Aenesidemus, do not need to be modified; in the case of other parts of philosophy, they do.

(1997, xxxi; cf. Bett 1994, 161 n. 63, and 2000, 231 n. 87)

Let me first note that nothing of what is said at *AM* XI 111 indicates that the sense of the verb ἐπέχειν is different from the sense that ἐποχή and ἐπέχω have at *PH* I 10 and 196, respectively, or that the sense of the verb ἀοριστεῖν is different from the sense that the proposition πάντα ἐστὶν ἀόριστα has at *PH* I 198–199. Now, in these passages from *PH*, suspension of judgment and indeterminacy make reference to the Skeptic's attitude of refraining from making any positive or negative assertion about non-evident things. It is also important to note that, in order to refer to the actions of affirming and denying, at *PH* I 10 and 198 Sextus employs the verbs τιθέναι and αἴρειν, while at *PH* I 196 he utilizes τιθέναι and ἀναιρεῖν. So on this point too the terminology employed is the same as that found at *AM* XI 111, and nothing said in this passage indicates that the verbs in question are used differently from the way they are used in *PH* I.<sup>31</sup> In sum, in both *AM* XI and *PH* I Sextus says that the Skeptic suspends judgment and refrains from making determinations, which means to refrain from accepting or abolishing anything. Note that this comparison between the two works is not illegitimate because, far from presupposing that the perspective of *AM* XI is similar to that of *PH*, it discovers a similarity between them. It is also worth remarking that at *AM* VIII 298 the verbs ἐπέχειν and ἀοριστεῖν are used in the typically Skeptical sense explained in *PH*. Sextus points out that, because

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<sup>31</sup> It is plain that in the passages of *PH* I in question Sextus uses the verbs ἀναιρεῖν and αἴρειν as synonyms. In *AM* VII–X he also utilizes the verb αἴρειν in contexts in which he might have well employed ἀναιρεῖν: see *AM* VII 437, VIII 150, 398, IX 317, 318, 392, X 44.

of the equipollence of the arguments pro and contra the existence of the sign, one must suspend judgment and make no determinations about the question under investigation, i.e., one must neither say that the sign exists nor that it does not exist, but say only that it is no more existent than nonexistent. Now, bearing in mind the strong similarities between certain passages of part A of *AM XI* and other passages from the Sextan corpus, if in *AM XI* the statements about the nonexistence of anything good or bad by nature are assertions to which the Skeptic assents, then it is necessary to conclude that there are incompatible standpoints not only between part A of *AM XI* and other Sextan texts, but also within part A. The only way of avoiding this conclusion is to accept Bett's hypothesis that, in *AM XI*, the notions of suspension and indeterminacy have a *sui generis* sense. But besides having no textual support, this hypothesis has implications which are, as we will see in a moment, highly problematic.

A final remark regarding *AM XI* 111 concerns Sextus' claim that the Skeptic neither affirms nor denies anything εἰκῇ, which may mean 'at random' or 'casually'.<sup>32</sup> In Bett's view, this "leaves open the possibility that some carefully considered affirmations and denials may be permitted" (1997, 131). If this is so, my interpretation of the passage in question faces a problem. However, the adverb εἰκῇ may also mean 'in vain' (which is the translation I chose), in which case one could interpret Sextus as saying that any affirmation or denial the Skeptic could make would be pointless because it would not express a belief about how things are or are not.

Another important point regarding the type of skepticism defended in *AM XI* concerns the expressions μὴ μᾶλλον and οὐ μᾶλλον, which are used at *AM XI* 118 and 147, respectively. Bett claims that in these two passages those expressions do not convey ignorance about whether *x* is *F* or *G*, but indicate that *x* is neither *F* nor *G* (Bett 1997, 140, 164). This indeed seems to be the sense of "not more" at *AM XI* 118, a passage cited in Section I. The situation, however, seems to be different in the case of *AM XI* 147:

He who ranks wealth neither among the things by nature good nor among the things by nature bad, but utters the expression "not more," is neither disturbed at its absence nor full of joy at its presence, but in either case remains undisturbed.

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<sup>32</sup> This is how Spinelli (1995) and Bett (1997) translate the adverb.

Nothing said here forces us to assume that the person in question believes that wealth is by nature neither good nor bad, since the reason he refrains from ranking it among the things which are by nature good or bad may be that he suspends judgment about the nature of wealth. In any case, the sense of μή μᾶλλον at *AM* XI 118 does seem incompatible with the way in which Sextus employs these expressions in *AM* VIII–X, where οὐ μᾶλλον (*AM* VIII 298, IX 59, X 45) and μή μᾶλλον (*AM* VIII 328, IX 50, 195, X 49) convey the Skeptic's agnostic outlook that neither affirms nor denies the existence of *x* (sign, demonstration, gods, cause, motion). In these passages, then, such phrases express the same suspensive attitude as in *PH* (see *PH* I 188–191; cf. *PH* I 213 and *AM* I 315). The problem, of course, arises because at *AM* XI 118 Sextus seems to be speaking *in propria persona*. Now, this difference in the sense of “not more” can be taken as nothing more than an inconsistency which is the product of Sextus' failure to integrate a piece of dogmatism into his Pyrrhonian outlook. We do not need to go so far as to say that the difference in question is the result of his perceiving a dissimilarity between the areas of logic and physics, on the one hand, and the area of ethics, on the other.

Bett's account of the differences between the skepticism expounded in *AM* VII–X and the skepticism which, in his view, Sextus adopts in part A of *AM* XI poses a serious problem.<sup>33</sup> For it requires us to accept that, in the same work, Sextus used key terms and expressions in incompatible senses without any warning to the reader. This is particularly problematic in the case of the term ἐποχή. If this word does possess the two senses Bett suggests, could Sextus have not perceived their incompatibility and could he have not bothered to offer an explanation of the ambiguity of the term? To avoid ascribing such an implausible oversight to Sextus, one could hypothesize that, in the lost part of *Adversus Dogmaticos*, he cautioned the reader that he would use that word in two different senses. Besides invoking a text we do not possess (which is methodologically improper), this hypothesis is highly problematic for another reason. Given that the lost part of the work provided a general treatment of the Pyrrhonian philosophy in which its defining traits were explained, such a treatment must have been consistent both with the skeptical outlook expounded in *AM* VII–X and with that expounded in *AM* XI. Now, we

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<sup>33</sup> The following considerations partially draw on Machuca (2008b).

know from *AM* XI 144 that, in the portion of the work which is no longer extant, there was a chapter on the τέλος of Skepticism in which it was claimed that ἀταραξία is attained by suspending judgment about everything. Acceptance of the supposition that Sextus distinguished between two senses of the notion of ἐποχή would commit one to assuming that, in that lost chapter, he indicated that ἀταραξία is reached in two different ways corresponding to two distinct forms of ἐποχή: in the logical and physical parts of philosophy, ἀταραξία is attained by adopting a kind of ἐποχή which, insofar as it is universal, is incompatible with all types of assertions, whereas in the ethical part ἀταραξία is attained by adopting a kind of ἐποχή which, although being universal, is compatible with both negative and relativized assertions. In addition, from *AM* VII 345 one may reasonably infer that, in the lost portion of the work, Sextus expounded the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus,<sup>34</sup> which are arguments designed to induce ἐποχή. Once again, acceptance of the aforementioned supposition would require one to assume that, in that lost portion, Sextus made it clear that the mode which especially bears on ethics (see *PH* I 145) induces a kind of ἐποχή different from that induced by the other nine modes. In general, if ἐποχή had signified things so distinct from one another in Sextus' own writings or in the different phases of the Pyrrhonian tradition, one would have most probably found some mention, explanation, or warning of the ambiguity of the term. For instance, Sextus would have said something in the passages of *PH* in which he explains the sense of ἐποχή (*PH* I 10, 196). This is all the more so if, as Bett claims, *PH* is later than *AM* VII–XI.

Now, if one thinks it highly unlikely for Sextus to have differentiated, in the lost part of *Adversus Dogmaticos*, between two varieties of skepticism in the way that has just been suggested, yet accepts Bett's view that he held there to be a difference between matters regarding ethics and matters regarding logic and physics, then one must—despite Bett's efforts—ascribe to Sextus an extremely low level of competence in composing the work. For he would have been incapable of integrating the form of skepticism defended in *AM* XI into his general account of Pyrrhonism in the lost part of the work, and hence incapable of making clear to his readers what his outlook was. I do think that *AM* XI contains elements of a

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<sup>34</sup> For the basis of this inference, see Machuca (2008b), n. 13.

negative dogmatism which are in conflict with a thoroughgoing suspension of judgment and which may be deemed “relics” of an earlier form of skepticism. But I also think that the skepticism of part A is much less uniform than Bett claims, and hence that its degree of incompatibility with the official Pyrrhonian outlook is much lower than he claims. In particular, I believe there is no evidence whatsoever that, in Sextus’ surviving writings, ἐποχή and other related key notions take on radically different senses.

#### IV

In some passages of *AM XI* Sextus does seem to reject ethical absolutism, but does he anywhere embrace a form of ethical realism? The first thing to note is that there is no reason why *AM XI* 114 and 118 must be read as expounding a type of realism according to which things are to be chosen (i.e., are good) or to be avoided (i.e., are bad) only in relation to different persons, times, and circumstances. First, at *AM XI* 65–67, Sextus mentions circumstances as the factor in relation to which one can say that *x* is preferred or dispreferred. As we saw, he is reporting an argument by the Stoic Aristo of Chios against the claim that some indifferent things are by nature preferred and others dispreferred. The similarity in question might be taken as a reason for thinking that, at *AM XI* 114 and 118, Sextus is arguing dialectically. For he may be adapting an argument advanced by a Dogmatist to suit his purpose: the same argument against the view that indifferent things are by nature preferred or dispreferred can be used against the view that things are by nature good or bad. Alternatively, if we think that at *AM XI* 118 Sextus is speaking in *propria persona*, as he seems to be doing, then we may interpret him as talking about the distinct ways things *appear* to be in relation to different persons, times, and circumstances (cf. Spinelli 1995, 296). This interpretation is confirmed by two texts belonging to part A in Bett’s division: *AM XI* 18–20 and 162–166. I will examine them in order, taking carefully into account Bett’s *sui generis* interpretation of the first passage.

At *AM XI* 18–20, Sextus makes the following preliminary caveat:

[18] It will perhaps be appropriate to elucidate this point in advance (προδιαρθρῶσαι), namely, that the term ‘is’ means two things: one is ‘really is’ (ὑπάρχει)—as, at the present moment, we say “It is day” in place of “It really is day”—the other being ‘appears’ (φαίνεται)—as some of the

mathematicians are often used to saying that the distance between two stars is a cubit, saying this as equivalent to “it appears so but is not really so at all” (for perhaps it is really one hundred stades, but it appears a cubit on account of the height, that is, on account of the separation from the eye). [19] In consequence, given that the component ‘is’ is twofold [in meaning], whenever we say (ὅταν λέγωμεν) skeptically “Of existing things some are good, some bad, and some between these,” we insert ‘is’ as indicative not of reality (ὑπάρξεως) but of appearance (φαίνεσθαι). For concerning the existence in relation to nature (περὶ τῆς πρὸς τῇ φύσιν ὑποστάσεως) of things good and bad and neither we have quite enough dispute with the Dogmatists; [20] but we have the habit of calling each of them good or bad or indifferent according to how they appear (κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον τούτων).

Bett maintains that this text “does *not* say that, *whenever* Sextus uses ‘is’, he is to be understood as meaning ‘appears’.” In fact, the opposite is implied; Sextus says that ‘It is day’ means ‘It actually is day’ (18), and he says that this is something that ‘we say’, without any hint that he, as a sceptic, might want to distance himself from this usage” (1997, 58). Rather, ‘is’ means ‘appears’ only in the case of the proposition “Of existing things, some are good, some bad, and some between these” (1997, 58).<sup>35</sup> Bett also claims that especially *AM* XI 68–78 and 112–118 show that “Sextus thinks that it is quite possible sometimes to make assertions (consistent with the sceptical outlook) in which ‘is’ does *not* need to be understood in the restricted sense ‘appears’” (1997, 58–59). In his analyses of *AM* XI 118 and 166, he also affirms that the Skeptic’s acceptance of relativized assertions is consistent with what we find at *AM* XI 18–20 (1997, 143, 177). The reason is that, in his view, the verb ὑπάρχειν does not necessarily refer to the nature of things, unlike the expressions ταῖς ἀληθείαις, ὄντως, and τῷ ὄντι, which are used at *AM* XI 68–78 and 114 as synonyms of φύσει (1997, 59). Bett explicitly ascribes an ambiguity to the verb ὑπάρχειν, since he thinks that, when εἶναι means ὑπάρχειν in the propositions “It is day” and “Of existing

<sup>35</sup> Bett also contends that, contrary to what is usually thought, *PH* I 135 does not allow us to affirm that, when Sextus uses ‘is’ to describe his own perspective, he always takes it in the sense of ‘appears’ (1997, 59; cf. 1994, 151 n. 42). For in that passage Sextus only points out that ‘is’ has this sense ἐνταῦθα ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις. However, even if this is the case as far as *PH* I 135 is concerned, *PH* I 4 makes it clear that in *PH* the verb εἶναι always means φαίνεσθαι when used in texts that describe the Skeptical outlook. For at *PH* I 4 Sextus indicates that everything that he will say in *PH* must be understood as a report of the way things appear to him at the very moment he is describing them. See also Sextus’ explanation of how to interpret the Skeptical φωναί at *PH* I 187–208.



things, some are good, some bad, and some between these,” εἶναι has two clearly different senses. In the first proposition, it has the meaning “‘is in the full sense, rather than in the restricted sense ‘appears’”—with no implication that the *real nature* of things is necessarily at issue” (1997, 59). This proposition does not refer to the nature of things because Sextus points out that it is uttered “at the present moment” (ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος), so that it is a relativized assertion. By contrast, in the second proposition, εἶναι refers to the nature of things. Whether a proposition that employs εἶναι in the sense of ὑπάρχειν does or does not refer to the nature of things “depends on the character of the claim in question, not just on the use of *esti* in the sense *huparchei*” (1997, 59). According to Bett’s reading, therefore, Sextus thinks that, if the proposition “*χ ὑπάρχει F*” is affirmed without restriction, ὑπάρχει has the sense of ‘is invariably or by nature’, whereas if it is restricted, ὑπάρχει takes on the sense ‘is in relation to certain variables’. Bett’s strategy is clear: if already at *AM* XI 18 Sextus accepts *in propria persona* a non-phenomenological use of εἶναι, and hence certain affirmations about what is objectively the case, then it is not strange that in other passages of *AM* XI he affirms that things can be considered good or bad in relation to certain persons and/or circumstances. In other words, at *AM* XI 18 Bett finds support for his interpretation according to which in *AM* XI Sextus adopts a non-absolutist or moderate type of ethical realism.<sup>36</sup> However, there are several strong reasons for rejecting his reading of *AM* XI 18–20.

The first reason is that, by saying that the verb ὑπάρχειν possesses two distinct senses, Bett commits himself to the controversial claim that Sextus is actually employing the verb εἶναι, not with two, but with three different senses, namely: (i) to be real in relation to the nature of the object, (ii) to be real relatively to a given person or to specific circumstances, and (iii) to appear. But if that is the case, why does Sextus not say so? He is very clear about what he is doing. He first distinguishes between two senses of the verb εἶναι and then applies this very distinction to the specific proposition “Of existing things, some are good, some bad,

<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that Bett does not say that Sextus embraces a non-absolutist or moderate type of ethical realism, but claims that Sextus’ position in *AM* XI could not be considered a form of realism according to the latter’s perspective. This, of course, does not mean that the position which, on Bett’s interpretation, Sextus endorses in *AM* XI is not a form of realism from our perspective. In any case, I will try to show that Sextus regards relativized assertions as claims about how things really are, and hence as claims about which he cannot but suspend judgment.

and some between these.” When this proposition is uttered by the Dogmatist, ‘are’ means ‘really are’, but when it is uttered by the Skeptic, ‘are’ merely means ‘appear’. If one adopts Bett’s taxonomy, one should ask: Why would Sextus explain sense (ii) of the verb ὑπάρχειν—that is, the sense it has in the proposition “It is day”—if, when he later says that the Skeptic does not use ‘is’ as indicative of ὑπάρξις, he has another sense in mind, namely, sense (i)? There is the possibility that he may be confused, but this seems far-fetched. Bett’s strategy here is the same as that followed with the notion of ἐποχή: in both cases, he ascribes two different senses to a key notion because otherwise the text would not (entirely) fit his interpretation. However, this is a forced reading of a text where there is no indication of such an ambiguity.

The second reason for rejecting Bett’s reading of *AM* XI 18–20 is that nothing of what Sextus says in this passage indicates that he accepts that judgments of the type “*x* is good/bad/indifferent for a person *P* in circumstances *C*” may be true. Indeed, the passage does not introduce any distinction between the claim of *x* being good (or bad or indifferent) by nature or invariably and the claim of *x* so being in relation to a given person or in relation to particular circumstances. On the contrary, the passage only states that *whenever* the Pyrrhonist says, e.g., that an action is good or bad, we must understand him as describing a value appearance.<sup>37</sup> And, as we saw, this is made as a preliminary caveat to be borne in mind when reading what follows in the rest of the book.<sup>38</sup> *Pace* Bett (1994, 151 n. 42), I think that *AM* XI 20 makes it clear that the Skeptic does not restrict his caveat to the dogmatic threefold ethical division, but to any claim, uttered by him, about anything being good, bad, or indifferent.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, even if we granted that the verb εἶναι is threefold in meaning, this would not support Bett’s view that Sextus accepts that things may actually be good or bad in specific circumstances. In sum, according to *AM* XI 18–20, value statements are of two types: those which describe that which appears to the speaker and those which express what the speaker believes is really the case; the Skeptic restricts himself to the first type of value statements, and

<sup>37</sup> See Machuca (2006), 119–120, 122–123. Cf. Spinelli (1995), 164–167, 170.

<sup>38</sup> For the sense of the verb προδιαρθρώσαι, see Spinelli (1995), 169.

<sup>39</sup> *Pace* Spinelli (in personal communication), I do not think that *AM* XI 20 licenses us to affirm that, when Sextus later says (to all appearances *in propria persona*) that nothing is by nature good or bad, ‘is’ is to be understood in the sense of ‘appears’.

hence does not embrace any form of ethical realism. It could be objected that, given that the distinction according to which things are good, bad, or indifferent is dogmatic, Sextus' warning that he will use 'are' in the sense of 'appear' is intended, not to express that he is reporting his non-epistemic appearances, but only to make it clear that he is not speaking *in propria persona* (Brennan 1999, 41–52). I am not persuaded by this reading because, first, if it were correct, Sextus would not have said that the Skeptic calls things good, bad, or indifferent according to how they appear to him, but rather that he calls them that way because his dogmatic rivals do so and he is arguing against them. Second, it seems to me that, when speaking of a habit, Sextus means a linguistic usage the Skeptic has acquired in both philosophical and everyday contexts, contexts within which people usually say that some things are good, some bad, and some neither. But, of course, when the Skeptic makes the same utterances, he is merely reporting the way things appear to him.

The third reason for rejecting Bett's reading is that it is by no means evident that, in the quoted passage, Sextus accepts *in propria persona* that the proposition "It is day," when uttered at the present moment, expresses what is objectively the case. For it is likely that, when explaining the two senses of the verb εἶναι and offering examples of each of them, he is simply referring to ordinary and scientific usages of language with the sole object of making clear the manner in which the Skeptic employs that verb. The fact that Sextus presents the proposition "It is day" as something that "we say" can perfectly be explained by the fact that the Skeptic adopts distinct linguistic usages depending on the context in which he finds himself: e.g., in philosophy he follows the linguistic practice of philosophers and in everyday life that which is more usual and local, for the sole reason that this makes communication easier (see *AM* I 232–235).

As for the final reason, I just noted that Sextus lines up with the usage of philosophers when he is in a philosophical context. In this regard, it should be observed that the proposition "It is day" is a typical example given to illustrate the dogmatic concept of what is evident (πρόδηλον), so that it is not strange that Sextus chooses this as an example of the first sense of the verb εἶναι at *AM* XI 18. Indeed, at the beginning of his discussion of signs in the second book of *PH*, Sextus points out that the Dogmatists divide things into two groups: those which are evident (πρόδηλα) and those which are non-evident (ἄδηλα) (*PH* II 97, cf. *PH* I 138). Evident things they define as "those which come to our knowledge by themselves" (*PH* II 97) or "those which are apprehended

by themselves" (*PH* II 99). Sextus mentions as an example the fact that it is day (*PH* II 97). The text gives the impression that the example is given by the Dogmatists, but in any case it is telling that the proposition "It is day" is used to illustrate the kind of thing which is considered to be evident by the Dogmatists. Now, at the end of the chapter that examines whether there is anything true by nature, Sextus says:

Given that the criterion of truth has appeared as subject to *aporia* (ἀπόρου), it is no longer possible to make assertions either about the things that seem to be clear (τῶν ἐναργῶν εἶναι δοκούντων), as far as what the Dogmatists say is concerned (ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τῶν δογματικῶν), or about the non-evident things. For, since the Dogmatists suppose that they apprehend the latter from the clear things, how, if we are forced to suspend judgment about the so-called clear things, could we dare to make affirmations about the non-evident things? (*PH* II 95)

Whereas the Dogmatist affirms that there are clear or evident things<sup>40</sup> which are apprehended by themselves and which make it possible to apprehend those which are non-evident, the Skeptic suspends judgment about them. The reason for the Skeptic's attitude is to be found in the disagreements concerning both apparent and non-evident things (see *PH* I 185).<sup>41</sup> I therefore think that we have grounds enough for inferring that the Skeptic does not believe or disbelieve that the proposition "It is day," which is an example of something evident, clear, or apparent, describes what is actually the case in relation to the present moment.

Bett could argue that it is not legitimate to use passages from *PH* to determine Sextus' outlook in *AM* XI, precisely because the type of skepticism expounded in this book differs from that found in *PH*. This objection is not serious, since even if we grant it, there are some passages from the other books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* that also make it clear that Sextus does not assent to the proposition "It is day," since he does not believe that this proposition describes what is actually the case at the present moment. First, when discussing the Stoics' theory of

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<sup>40</sup> Although this passage speaks of τὰ ἐναργῆ and not of τὰ πρόδηλα, Sextus uses these expressions as well as τὰ φαινόμενα, τὰ προσιπτόντα, τὰ προφανῆ, and τὰ συνεσκιασμένα as synonyms (see *PH* I 138, *AM* VII 25–26, VIII 141–149, 316–320).

<sup>41</sup> This is not to say, of course, that the Skeptic rejects what is apparent altogether (see *PH* I 19–20), but only as it is conceived of by the Dogmatists, as the phrase ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς λεγομένοις ὑπὸ τῶν δογματικῶν makes clear. He acknowledges that things presently appear a certain way to him and takes τὰ φαινόμενα as a criterion of action (*PH* I 21–24), but refrains from taking it as an epistemic criterion, as Dogmatists do. See further note 42 below.

φαντασία in *AM* VII, he reports that they make a fourfold distinction: some appearances are persuasive (πιθαναί), some unpersuasive, some both persuasive and unpersuasive, and some neither persuasive nor unpersuasive. As examples of the first type, Sextus mentions the facts that, “now (νῦν), it is day and I am conversing and everything that has a similar obviousness (περιφανείας)” (*AM* VII 242). Given that Sextus is expounding a dogmatic theory, it is reasonable to assume that he endorses neither the taxonomy *nor* the examples that illustrate each type of φαντασία.

Second, when presenting the problems faced by the claim that all appearances are true, Sextus points out:

We are not moved in the same way, at the present moment (ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος), in relation to “It is day” and in relation to “It is night,” or in relation to “Socrates lives” and “Socrates is dead,” nor do these things in any way provide equal evidence (τὴν ἴσην ... ἐνάργειαν), but “It is now day” and “Socrates is dead” seem to be credible (πιστὸν ἔοικεν ὑπάρχειν), whereas “It is night” and “Socrates is alive” are not equally credible but appear to be among the unreal things (τῶν ἀνυπάρχοντων φαίνεται).

(*AM* VII 391)

There is no reason to think that Sextus is speaking *in propria persona* when talking about evidence and credibility, for he may just be putting forward the argument that allows him to refute the specific dogmatic claim under consideration. In the end, Sextus suspends judgment about the truth of the claim “All appearances are true.” This is confirmed by the fact that he elsewhere observes that there is an undecidable dispute among those who affirm that all appearances or all perceptibles are true or existent, those who affirm that all are false or nonexistent, and those who affirm that some are true or existent and some false or nonexistent (*AM* VII 369, VIII 213–214, 354–355). I therefore believe that Sextus mentions the proposition “It is day” in the quoted passage because it is a typical dogmatic example of something that is allegedly evident. In addition, he is cautious enough to use the verbs ἔοικεν and φαίνεται as indications that he is not committed to any assertion about what is objectively the case, not even in the present moment. This, of course, is not to deny that, e.g., it appears to him that it is day at the present moment, but this appearance is non-doxastic or non-epistemic.

Third, at the outset of his discussion of signs in *AM* VIII, Sextus observes that “there is a certain highest twofold distinction among things, according to which some are evident, others non-evident” (*AM* VIII 141). The former are “those which manifest themselves immediately (τὰ

αὐτόθεν ὑποπίπτοντα) to the senses and to the intellect" (AM VIII 141) or "those which come to our knowledge by themselves, such as, at the present moment (ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος), the fact that it is day or that I am conversing" (AM VIII 144). Similarly, at AM VIII 316 Sextus says that clear things are "those which are grasped involuntarily by means of an appearance, that is, by means of an affection, such as now (νῦν) 'It is day' and 'This is a man.'" Thus, in *Adversus Dogmaticos* too the proposition "It is day" is offered as an example of what the Dogmatists call τὸ πρόδηλον or τὸ ἐναργές. I think that here as well Sextus probably offers that example because it is used by the Dogmatists themselves in their distinction between two kinds of things.

Now, just as in *PH*, in *Adversus Dogmaticos* Sextus suspends judgment about what the Dogmatists deem to be evident or clear, as can be seen in three passages. The first is found in the chapter in which he investigates whether there is a sign. He observes that, given the distinction between evident and non-evident things,

the discussion of the criterion, directed towards [showing] the aporia regarding clear things (εἰς τὴν τῶν ἐναργῶν ἀπορίαν), has been expounded by us most methodically. For given that the criterion turned out to be uncertain (ἄβεβαίον), it also becomes impossible to affirm about the things that appear that they are in their nature such as they appear.

(AM VIII 141–142)

The reason the uncertainty about the criterion makes the Skeptic refrain from affirming that things are as they appear is that, according to the Dogmatists, what is clear is known immediately by means of a criterion. This is explained in our second passage:

Since it seems that clear things become known immediately by means of a criterion, while non-evident things are traced by means of signs and demonstrations through the transition from clear things, let us inquire in order, first, into whether there is a criterion of the things that manifest themselves immediately (τῶν αὐτόθεν ... προσπιπτόντων) through sense-perception or thought, and after that into whether there is a way capable of signifying or demonstrating non-evident things. For I think that, once these have been abolished, there will no longer be any investigation about the necessity to suspend judgment, since nothing true is discovered either in apparent things (προφανέσι) or in obscure things (συνεσχιασμένοις).

(AM VII 25–26)

The third passage forms part of Sextus' discussion of whether the senses, the intellect, or both can be deemed to be the criterion 'through which.' He observes that, if the intellect gets in contact with external things independently of the senses, then it has to

grasp the underlying objects as clear, but nothing is clear, as we will establish; therefore, it is not possible to perceive the truth in the underlying objects. For what is clear is deemed by our rivals to be that which is perceived by means of itself and does not need anything else to establish it. But nothing is of a nature to be perceived by means of itself, but all things are perceived by means of an affection, which is other than the object that appears (φανταστοῦ) which produces it. (...) Therefore, since what is perceived by means of another thing is, by everyone's agreement, non-evident, and all things are perceived by means of our affections, from which they differ, all external things are non-evident and for this reason unknown (ἄγνωστα) to us. (...) But if, in order for us to know what is true, there has to be something clear, but it has been shown that all things are non-evident, it must be acknowledged that what is true is unknown.

(AM VII 364–365, 366, 368)

Although particularly in this third text Sextus seems to espouse a negative dogmatic view according to which nothing is clear and known, at AM VII 443–444 he makes it plain that the Skeptic propounds arguments against the criterion in order, not to demonstrate its nonexistence, but to counterbalance the belief in its existence, thereby reaching ἰσοσθένεια (cf. AM VIII 159–160, 298, 327–328, 476–477, IX 206–207). Accordingly, the Skeptic does not deny the existence of τὰ ἐναργῆ or τὰ πρόδηλα, but rather suspends judgment about whether anything is known by means of itself. Now, given that he cannot affirm that things are as they appear to be, it is plain that he cannot affirm that the proposition “It is day” or any other proposition describes what is objectively the case in specific circumstances. Otherwise, he could indeed affirm that, in those circumstances, things are just as they appear to be.

The several passages from AM VII–VIII which have been analyzed make it clear that we should not assume that, at AM XI 18, Sextus takes the use of εἶναι in the sense of ὑπάρχειν as acceptable for the Skeptic. According to Bett, at AM XI 18 Sextus accepts the proposition “It is day” because it is a relativized assertion, i.e., it is limited to the present moment. However, at AM VII 242 and 391 as well as at AM VIII 144 and 316, Sextus uses the same temporal restriction employed at AM XI 18, but the passages examined make it clear that he suspends judgment about the truth of the proposition “It is day,” which is a typical example he gives to illustrate what the Dogmatists themselves conceive of as πρόδηλον or ἐναργές.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Tad Brennan maintains that “the ‘evidence’ that the skeptic attacks is the self-

AM XI 162–166 is the second passage from part A in Bett's division that might be taken as evidence that the Skeptic does not believe that something can be objectively good or bad in relation to specific circumstances. In this passage, Sextus answers two objections directed against the Skeptic, namely: his outlook reduces him either to ἀνεργησία or to ἀπέμφοσις. The reason why he would be inactive is that "as the whole of life consists in choices and avoidances, he who neither chooses nor avoids anything implicitly rejects life and stays still like a vegetable" (163). And the reason why he is inconsistent is that in case a tyrant ordered him to do something unspeakable, either he would disobey and accept death or, to avoid this, he would obey the order (cf. DL IX 108). In either case, he would choose one course of action and avoid the other, which shows that he has apprehended that there is something to be avoided and something to be chosen. Sextus points out that those who raise these objections do not understand the way the Skeptic acts, since he

does not live in accordance with philosophical reasoning—for he is inactive as far as this is concerned—but he is capable of choosing some things and avoiding others in accordance with the non-philosophical observance. (165)

Sextus then remarks that the Skeptic will choose one or the other course of action following "the preconception (πρόληψις) in accordance with his ancestral laws and customs" (166; cf. AM IX 49, PH I 23–24, DL IX 108).<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Pyrrhonist's decisions are made according to the frame-

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evident, foundational perceptions of certain broadly empiricist epistemological theories. It is only because 'enargeia' was posited as a criterion that the Skeptic attacks it; and he only attacks its use *as a criterion*" (1999, 13 n. 2). I agree that the Skeptic targets what is evident *qua* criterion, but, unlike Brennan, I think this means that he calls into question any claim which purports to describe immediately what is the case or from which one believes it is possible to infer what is the case. This is why, when leaving aside what is evident as a criterion of truth, what remains is the way things non-doxastically or non-epistemically appear to the Skeptic. This issue is, of course, related to the thorny question of the scope of Pyrrhonian ἐποχή, a question I cannot address here. For the original debate on this topic between Barnes, Burnyeat, and Frede, see the five papers collected in Burnyeat and Frede (1997). See also Glidden (1983), Stough (1984), Barney (1992), Brunschwig (1995), Brennan (1999), Fine (2000), Bailey (2002), chs. 7–9, 11, Barnes (2007), Thorsrud (2009), ch. 9, and Perin (2010), ch. 3. This vexed issue is also tackled in Filip Grgić's contribution to the present volume.

<sup>43</sup> For an analysis of the moral and political implications of Sextus' example of the Skeptic's response to the tyrant, see Laursen (2004). For a general analysis of AM XI 162–167, see Spinelli (1995), 326–334, and (2005), 141–145.



work of laws and traditions in which he finds himself, not according to “philosophical reasoning.” That is, in the specific situation described here, his decision will not be made on the basis of a rationally justified argument that determines, for example, what the morally correct course of action is or what the real nature of death is, but on the basis of the ideas about morality and death which prevail or are more common in his community. Even though the Pyrrhonist does not believe that what the laws and customs of his community say is true or false, he follows them because in order to act one must follow some rules, and so far he has not found any rationally justified reason which prevents him from guiding his actions by the preconceptions he has in fact acquired by virtue of those social norms.<sup>44</sup> Hence, not even in the *particular* extreme situation in question will the Skeptic claim that what he decides and does *objectively* is good or bad for him, but will act according to the *appearances* he has by virtue of certain factors.<sup>45</sup> That τὰ φαινόμενα are taken here as the criterion of action is clear from Sextus’ saying at AM XI 166 that the Skeptic will bear that difficult and unpleasant situation more easily than the Dogmatist, simply because he does not have any additional opinion (οὐδεν προσδοξάζει) about it (cf. AM XI 147–148, 158). I take this to mean that he does not believe that one of the alternatives is objectively bad not even in those specific circumstances, since otherwise he would have the belief or opinion that the situation is intrinsically harsh and to be avoided because in such particular circumstances he may choose the wrong course of action. There is then no ethical realism here, but the characteristically Pyrrhonian attitude of guiding action by the way things appear. In addition, one could argue that, if Sextus accepted that, in particular circumstances, certain things are good or to be chosen whereas others are bad or to be avoided, he could not respond adequately to the charge that he is inconsistent. Indeed, the person who presses the charge would argue that the Skeptic does accept that, in the particular situation in which a tyrant orders him to do an unspeakable deed, he apprehends that there is something to be chosen and something to be avoided. This is therefore another reason why the passage under consideration should

<sup>44</sup> In the present passage, the term *προλήψις* refers to a non-theoretical or non-epistemic notion or idea conventionally accepted by people. Cf. Spinelli (1995), 329 and Bett (1997), 177.

<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that these factors may also include the education the Skeptic received and his own personal experiences, which may run counter to the laws and customs of his community.

be understood in the sense that the Skeptic's observance of the laws and customs of his community is nothing but his following the various ways things non-epistemically appear to him. Bett could perhaps claim that one must construe the objection as saying that the Skeptic actually apprehends that there is something "to be chosen and to be avoided *by nature*," so that the Skeptic's response would be adequate even if his observance of certain norms and customs implied the holding of beliefs about what things are like relative to specific persons or circumstances. However, as far as I can tell, there is no reason at all to read the text in this restricted way. In addition, my way of reading the text is in agreement with what Sextus tells us elsewhere in the same work. At the beginning of *AM VII*, he says that, in making his practical decisions, the Skeptic follows his appearances:

[B]y necessity those who philosophize in aporetic fashion, in order not to be completely inactive and ineffective in the actions of everyday life, had to possess a criterion both of choice and of avoidance, namely what appears (*τὸ φαινόμενον*). (AM VII 30)

Every decision on what to choose and what to avoid in daily life is made according to that which appears to the Skeptic at the moment he is making the decision. Hence, not even the decisions made in specific circumstances should be read as revealing that the Skeptic believes that certain things are objectively good or bad relative to him in those circumstances.

In sum, the passages from part A of *AM XI* that have been examined in this section show that the perspective adopted therein is not, as Bett's interpretation entails, a moderate form of ethical realism. Rather, the Skeptic of *AM XI* restricts himself to describing his non-doxastic value appearances. In this respect, part A is not, therefore, in dissonance with the Pyrrhonism expounded in both *PH* and *AM VII–X*.

## V

It seems hard to deny that there is a strong tension between a number of passages of *AM XI* and the 'official' Pyrrhonian perspective expounded particularly in *PH*. At times, *AM XI* seems to ascribe to the Pyrrhonist both (i) the opinion that nothing is invariably good or bad, and (ii) the assertion that holding this opinion makes it possible to attain the states of *ἀταραξία* and *εὐδαιμονία*. Whereas the negative arguments put forward in *AM XI* that make use of principle *Π* could be taken as being

merely dialectical—as happens in the case of the negative arguments found in the ethical section of *PH* III—the dialectical reading does not explain the texts which seem to straightforwardly ascribe (i) and (ii) to the Pyrrhonist himself.

I think Bett is right in having insisted on the presence in *AM* XI of elements which seem incompatible with what we regard as genuine Pyrrhonism. However, as we saw, his interpretation faces two serious problems. The first is that this book deviates from the official Pyrrhonian stance to a much lesser degree than he claims. For there is a conflict, not only between what Bett calls parts A and B, but especially within the former part, which therefore does not expound a form of skepticism which is homogeneous and coherent. The reason is that in part A we detect two tensions. First, the Skeptic is said, on the one hand, to suspend judgment about everything and to restrict his discourse to the realm of his appearances, but on the other he seems to deny the existence of anything by nature good or bad. The claim that in *AM* VII–XI the notion of ἐποχή has two different senses creates, as we saw, a problem that is more serious than the one it intends to solve. Second, sometimes the Skeptic is said to attain the states of undisturbedness and happiness through universal suspension of judgment, but sometimes the attainment of these states is said to be possible only through the denial of ethical absolutism. Thus, some passages from part A expound a skepticism which is in perfect agreement with the Pyrrhonism defended in most of Sextus' extant corpus. One can interpret the tensions detected in part A of *AM* XI as a sign that also in this book (and not only in *AM* VII–X, as Bett claims) Sextus is trying to integrate, without complete success, an earlier version of skepticism into the later variety which he himself adopts. It seems difficult, and even impossible, to completely iron out those tensions.

The second problem faced by Bett's interpretation is that, in part A, Sextus makes it entirely clear that the Skeptic refrains from affirming (or denying) that things are objectively good or bad in relation to specific persons or circumstances. In other words, Sextus does not endorse (nor reject) a type of ethical realism similar to what we call situational ethics. Rather, he merely describes the various ways things appear to him by virtue of certain factors such as the laws and customs of his community, the manner in which he was raised, and the education he received. On this point, there does not seem to be any tension within *AM* XI or between this book and the rest of the Sextan corpus.

In conclusion, whereas at times in *AM XI* Sextus seems to deny ethical absolutism, he clearly does not espouse a moderate form of ethical realism.<sup>46</sup>

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# IS THE PYRRHONIST AN INTERNALIST?\*

Otávio Bueno

## 1. *Introduction*

The Pyrrhonist is a well-known troublemaker, who systematically challenges those who claim to have knowledge, or justified belief, by raising doubts as to whether, according to their own standards, they do in fact know what they claim to know, or are justified in believing what they claim to be justified in believing. Not surprisingly, Pyrrhonism has also been criticized. And the typical form of criticism charges the view with incoherence: in order to effectively criticize philosophical proposals, the Pyrrhonist needs to make assumptions, and by making the latter, the Pyrrhonian stance is ultimately undermined. After all, the Pyrrhonist advertises his/her stance as one that does not involve making claims (in particular about the ultimate nature of things). If such claims are implicitly or explicitly invoked in the critical evaluation of philosophical views, the Pyrrhonist brings through the back door what he/she was allegedly trying to avoid in the first place. A form of this criticism is implied in Jonathan Barnes' quite insightful treatment of Pyrrhonism (see Barnes 1990), in which it is stated that the Pyrrhonist may end up assuming an internalist conception of knowledge as part of his challenge to dogmatic philosophy. If Barnes' interpretation were correct, it would constitute a strong criticism of Pyrrhonism—even if Barnes himself does not present his interpretation as a criticism of the latter.

In this paper, I resist this assessment of Pyrrhonism, at least as presented in Sextus Empiricus' extant works, in particular in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Annas & Barnes 2000). I argue that, as a philosophical doctrine about the nature of knowledge, or justification, internalism is precisely the sort of view about which the Pyrrhonist suspends

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judgment. Moreover, properly articulated, Pyrrhonism offers a critical way of addressing the internalism/externalism debate which, being less committed, is also in some respects more illuminating.

## 2. *An Internalist Pyrrhonism?*

Pyrrhonism is a particular attitude of investigation: the ability to oppose appearances and objects of thought in every possible way, in order to try to determine which things (if any) the skeptic, or the Pyrrhonist,<sup>1</sup> should assent to. However, as Sextus Empiricus notes, since “to every account an equal account is opposed” (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (PH) I 12; see also PH I 202–205), and since these opposed accounts are equally persuasive to the skeptic, he is unable to decide between them, and suspends judgment. As a result, the Pyrrhonist ends up holding no beliefs about the underlying features—or the true nature—of the phenomena. In Sextus’ own words:

Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment and afterwards to tranquility. (PH I 8)

Central to the Pyrrhonian strategy of investigation is the exploration of Agrippa’s modes—disagreement, relativity, hypothesis, circularity, and infinite regress (PH I 164–177).<sup>2</sup> With these modes the Pyrrhonist has a strategy to make explicit that, according to the standards embraced by dogmatic philosophers, the latter seem to be unable to assent to their own doctrines. In outline, the (well-known) strategy is this: To begin with, the Pyrrhonist points out that there is disagreement regarding the true nature of a given object. In order to try to settle the disagreement, the dogmatic philosopher cannot simply assert without argument his or her view about the issue; otherwise, someone could just as easily assert, also without argument, the negation of the dogmatist’s claim. None of these maneuvers would be persuasive (hypothesis). Moreover, in order to support his or her view, the dogmatic philosopher cannot offer a reason that presupposes the truth of that view, given that such

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<sup>1</sup> I will use these terms interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of the present paper, relativity won’t play any role. So, I’ll ignore it here.



a reasoning would be blatantly circular (circularity). This means that the dogmatic philosopher needs to offer reasons that are independent of the view he or she is trying to defend. But these reasons cannot in turn just be asserted without justification—otherwise, one could simply assert the negation of these reasons (hypothesis, again). In other words, the reasons in question also need to be justified by other reasons. The new reasons, in turn, similarly need to be supported, and this yields an infinite regress of reasons (infinite regress).

Jonathan Barnes has examined very carefully the use made by the Pyrrhonist of Agrippa's modes (Barnes 1990). He suggests that the Pyrrhonist is ultimately committed to a form of internalism in order to be able to respond to the foundationalist externalism of various dogmatic philosophies (see Barnes 1990, 136–144). Central to his case is the interpretation of certain passages of Sextus. Consider, in particular, the following (see Barnes 1990, 138–139; I use here Barnes' own translation):

Let us imagine that some people are looking for gold in a dark room full of treasures. It will happen that each will grasp one of the things lying in the room and think he has got hold of the gold. But none of them will be persuaded that he has hit upon the gold even if he has in fact hit upon it. In the same way, the crowd of philosophers has come into the world, as into a vast house, in search of truth. But it is reasonable that the man who grasps the truth should doubt whether he has been successful. (AM VII 52)

Here Sextus offers a simile suggesting an analogy between knowing whether one has found gold in a dark room and whether one has found the truth. In both cases, it is reasonable to doubt whether someone who may have found gold or the truth has in fact been successful. As Barnes points out, commenting on the passage above (which he calls the 'Sextan similes'):

We might well suppose that Sextus is here tacitly assuming that if you know that P, you must know that you know that P; that if you are justified in believing that P, then you must be justified in believing that you are justified in believing that P. The [...] Sextan similes might seem to amount to this: an externalist is not entitled to hold *that he knows* that P; therefore he is not entitled to hold that P. For the argument implicit in the similes might appear to run as follows: since the Dogmatist does not know that P is in  $\beta$  [that is, the set of foundational beliefs used by the Dogmatist to obtain knowledge], he does not know that he knows that P. And since he does not know that he knows that P, he does not know that P. The second step of this argument relies on the thesis that if x knows that P, then x knows that x knows that P. (Barnes 1990, 141)

On this reading, the Pyrrhonist seems to be ultimately committed to internalism. But is this a position a Pyrrhonist could coherently adopt?

Barnes continues the dialectic between the (allegedly internalist) Pyrrhonist and the externalist, and he notes that the characterizing feature of internalism, the KK-thesis—i.e. the claim that in order to know that P one needs to know that one knows that P—is clearly false (1990, 142). After all, there doesn't seem to be anything incoherent if I claimed that I didn't realize that I knew something. And to the extent that the Pyrrhonist relies on the KK-thesis as part of his critique of the externalist, the latter has an easy way out—by simply rejecting the thesis.

However, Barnes insists, not every argument invoked by the Pyrrhonist relies on that thesis. In particular, the Pyrrhonist need not be raising the issue as to whether the externalist knows that he knows that P. Rather, the Pyrrhonist is concerned with whether the externalist will *claim* that P (Barnes 1990, 142). Presumably, one can grant that the externalist knows that P; the issue is whether he is in a position to claim that P. If the externalist makes such a claim, on the grounds that P is a foundational belief, it is likely that he will then be justified in claiming that P. But the whole point of an externalist account is to deny that this move is in fact needed. One can know that P without having thereby to invoke the fact that P is a foundational belief (or the fact that P follows from other foundational beliefs). This additional bit of justification is ultimately dispensable.

This puts the externalist in the awkward position of not being able to claim that P when he is justified in believing P—given the fact that P is a foundational belief. (As just noted, this sort of justification is internalist, after all.) The upshot, according to Barnes, is that it is unclear whether the externalist is in a position to continue to maintain that P.

If he *does* continue to maintain that P, then he is maintaining something which he does not believe he is justified in maintaining. It is not that he confesses, under pressure from the Pyrrhonist, that he is *not* justified in believing P. It is simply that he does not believe that he *is* justified in believing P. He suspends judgement over the question whether he is justified in believing P. And the friendly Pyrrhonist has made him aware of all this. Now it is, of course, perfectly *possible* to believe P while not believing that you are justified in believing P. But is this a *rational* state of mind to be in? Can I rationally say: 'I think that honey is sweet, but I don't think I'm justified in thinking that honey is sweet'? If I make such report, I am confessing to a curious state of mind; I am not presenting the reasonable consequence of a respectable philosophical thesis.

(Barnes 1990, 143)

Of course, if that happens, Barnes concludes, the discussion will end on a skeptical note (1990, 144). After all, the externalist would have recognized that, according to his own standards, in maintaining P, he would be maintaining something that he does not believe he is justified in maintaining. But is it reasonable to expect that the discussion will end this way?

I don't think it is.

### 3. *Pyrrhonism without Internalism*

#### 3.1. *An Externalist Response*

The externalist is unlikely to be moved by Barnes' reconstruction of the dialectic. After all, if P is indeed in the set of foundational beliefs, the externalist will then believe he is justified in believing P. Why is this so?

Recall that the externalist under consideration is also a foundationalist, and so typically if a belief is in the set of foundational beliefs, it is justified. Suppose now that P is a foundational belief (that is, P is a member of the relevant set of foundational beliefs). Nothing in the externalist stance prevents the externalist from *believing* that this is the case. In fact, the externalist may even offer an argument as to why P is a foundational belief, by indicating that P satisfies the relevant membership conditions for being in that set. In this case, he will believe he is justified in believing P. It is simply that the externalist does not *require* such a belief in order for him to be justified in believing P. If P is a foundational belief, that fact in and of itself is sufficient for justification. The additional belief that P is in the foundation is not required for such justification. But it is not as though the foundationalist is somehow *prevented* from having such a belief. On the contrary, as noted, the foundationalist may even provide an argument to indicate that a given belief is foundational. This is not to say that foundational beliefs become members of the relevant set of foundational beliefs in virtue of this argument. The argument only indicates the foundationalist's recognition of the foundational status of the beliefs under consideration. With an externalist constraint on justification, the argument in question is not required for an agent to be justified in believing something.

But if the externalist can believe that he is justified in believing P (as long as P is in the set of foundational beliefs, or follows from such a set), there is no difficulty for him to claim that he is justified in believing P. In this case, his claim is simply an expression of his belief. Not surprisingly,

the externalist would not suspend judgment over the question of his justification in believing P. In fact, for the reasons just indicated, he would resist any attempt to force him to do so.

By the same token, the externalist would resist Barnes' attempt to corner him into a quasi-Moorean predicament of believing P and not believing that he is justified in believing P. After all, as noted, nothing prevents the externalist from believing that, as long as P is a foundational belief (or follows from other foundational beliefs), he is justified in believing P. These considerations prevent the externalist from being in such a quandary.

In response, Barnes may note that for the externalist to be justified in believing P, he could invoke a typically internalist strategy of justification; that is, given that (by hypothesis) P is in the set of foundational beliefs, the externalist is justified in believing P. However, by hypothesis the externalist will resist making such an internalist move. As Barnes notes, the externalist

will actually be justified in claiming that P (on the externalist hypothesis) provided that because P is in  $\beta$  [the set of foundational beliefs] he believes that P. But *ex hypothesi* he will not make this further claim. For [...] the whole point and purpose of his externalist invocation of basic beliefs is that he may justifiably believe that P *without* making the further claim that because P is in  $\beta$  he believes in P. Thus whether or not he *is* justified in claiming that P, he will not respond to the sceptic's challenge by *claiming* that he is so justified. (Barnes 1990, 143)

So, on this reading, prompted by the Pyrrhonist, the externalist will *not* claim to be justified in believing P—whether or not he is justified in having the belief in question.

Let us grant that the externalist will not make the internalist move (of claiming that he believes that P because of P's foundational status). Does this mean that the externalist is in no position to believe that he is justified in believing that P? Not at all—at least nothing in his externalist stance forces him to do so. Presumably for the externalist *not* to believe that he is justified in believing P, he should be in an appropriate state of mind—corresponding to not having the belief in question. But from the sheer fact that he is an externalist he is in no way precluded from being in the state of believing that he is justified in believing P.

Once again, as opposed to what is suggested by Barnes (1990, 143), it is unclear that the externalist would suspend judgment over the question whether he is justified in believing P. Now, judgment and belief, strictly speaking, belong to different categories: the former is an act, the latter is

a state (Barnes 2000, xxiv). However, to suspend judgment and to withhold belief are both *acts*, and it's not unreasonable to expect them to be connected. For example, to suspend judgment over an issue *S*, the externalist, or anyone else for that matter, (i) would *not* believe that *S*, and (ii) would *not* believe that not-*S*—after carefully considering whether *S* or not-*S* is the case.<sup>3</sup> On this construal, suspension of judgment requires lack of belief in *both* *S* and not-*S* (following a careful examination of each alternative). Clearly, lack of belief in one of them alone is not sufficient to motivate suspension of judgment. Thus, even if the externalist did not believe that he was justified in believing *P* (condition (i)), this would *not* lead him to thereby suspend judgment over the issue. The externalist would also need *not* to believe that he was *not* justified in believing *P* (condition (ii)). But why would he be in that state of mind?

Well, he wouldn't. In order *not* to believe that he is not justified in believing that *P*, the externalist would need to *believe* that he is justified in believing that *P*—which is inconsistent with the externalist's initial state of *not* believing that he is justified in believing that *P*. I am assuming here the principle according to which an epistemic agent does not believe that not-*A* if and only if the agent believes that *A*, which seems to hold in general—unless the agent has no beliefs about whether *A* or not-*A* is the case.<sup>4</sup> Given that, from the considerations above, it is perfectly possible for the externalist to hold beliefs about whether he is justified in believing something, the principle in question *does* apply. As a result, the externalist could not consistently suspend judgment in this case.

My goal here is to register two points: (a) the externalist is not *required* to suspend judgment over the issue of whether he believes he is justified in believing that *P*, and (b) he had better *not* suspend the judgment in case he doesn't believe that he is justified in believing that *P*. In the latter case,

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<sup>3</sup> Barnes analyzes the conditions for an epistemic agent to be *skeptical* with regard to a certain proposition *P* in terms of the agent not believing that *P* and not believing that not-*P*—after having considered whether or not *P* (2000, xix). It seems to me that, in the context of Pyrrhonism, this analysis offers an excellent characterization of the conditions for suspension of judgment over *P*. In fact, Barnes himself offers such a characterization: "In schematic terms, I suspend judgment with regard to a proposition *P* if, having considered the matter, I neither believe that *P* nor believe that not-*P*" (Barnes 1990, 9).

<sup>4</sup> I'm also assuming that the epistemic agents in question value consistent beliefs—an assumption that is also shared by both internalists and externalists.

consistency would prevent the externalist from suspending judgment over the issue. In the former case, consistency allows the externalist not to suspend judgment just as well.

### 3.2. *Resisting the Internalist Interpretation*

We should now consider internalism. In particular, is Barnes' (tentative) assessment of Pyrrhonism as a form of internalism correct? It does not seem to be.

First, internalism is, of course, a philosophical doctrine about the nature of knowledge or, at least, justification, or both (just as externalism is). The doctrine specifies conditions for knowledge, and articulates a particular conception of what is required for knowledge (or justification, or both) to be obtained. As such, internalism is the sort of view about which the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment. Perfectly analogous points can be made about externalism as well. Given Agrippa's modes, the Pyrrhonist is clearly unable to decide which of these views (if any) offers the correct account of knowledge (or, at least, justification). Not believing that internalism is correct (given the disagreement with externalists), and not believing that externalism is correct (given the disagreement with internalists), the Pyrrhonist will suspend judgment over the issue.<sup>5</sup> (I will return to this point below.)

Second, it is possible to interpret in a perfectly agnostic way the passages above from Sextus that Barnes reads as committing the Pyrrhonist to internalism. In fact, in these passages Sextus indicates that, given the particular conditions of inquiry—namely, to search for gold in a dark room, or to search for truth without a suitable criterion—it is proper to doubt as to whether, according to an externalist view, knowledge has in fact been acquired, quite independently of whether the subject knows that he/she knows or not. Rather than expressing a dubious commitment to internalism, these passages indicate arguments the Pyrrhonist invokes in order to challenge those who are committed to a particular externalist view of knowledge whether they do in fact have the knowledge they claim to have. Being in a dark room, the person cannot know, simply by looking, that what she has in her hands is indeed gold—even if it in fact

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<sup>5</sup> I suspect that Barnes would not disagree with that, even though it is unclear to what extent the distinction between internalism and externalism has been explicitly articulated in ancient Greek philosophy.

is. Similarly, the dogmatic philosopher cannot know that he has found the truth, given the lack of a criterion—even if he has been successful. In both cases, what is being challenged is the reliability of the procedure that supposedly generates the knowledge in question. In a dark room, one cannot know that a certain object is made of gold by simply looking at the object. And one cannot know that one has reached the truth without a suitable criterion. The issue of whether one knows that one knows doesn't arise here. What is being directly challenged is the first-order knowledge claim that an externalist may make.

Finally, even if Sextus were invoking an internalist conception of knowledge in the passages Barnes discusses, this would not require the Pyrrhonist to accept internalism—any more than Sextus needs to accept the Aristotelian conception of knowledge in order to criticize Plato's epistemological views in light of Aristotle's. Those who are internalists can criticize externalists along the lines that Barnes suggests that Sextus is exploring. However, by invoking this style of argument, the Pyrrhonist is arguing dialectically, simply implementing his strategy of opposing arguments to counterarguments. There is no need for the Pyrrhonist to *endorse* such arguments in order to implement such a strategy.

A reading along these lines does not commit the Pyrrhonist to a philosophically contentious conception of knowledge, nor does it saddle the Pyrrhonist with an ultimately incoherent view. After all, the proposed reading does not attribute to the Pyrrhonist a particular view about knowledge (namely, internalism), which would make the Pyrrhonist incoherent, given the latter's lack of commitment to particular philosophical views. I submit that the interpretation advanced here makes better sense of the overall Pyrrhonian stance than the alleged Pyrrhonian commitment to internalism suggested by Barnes in the interpretation of the passages in question.

### 3.3. *Disagreement about Internalism and Externalism*

How would a Pyrrhonian approach the internalism/externalism debate in epistemology then?<sup>6</sup> As just noted, given that these are philosophical conceptions about the nature of knowledge (or, at least, justification),

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<sup>6</sup> For an insightful neo-Pyrrhonian treatment of externalism and internalism—in a somewhat different sense than the one examined here—see Fogelin (1994). Fogelin distinguishes ontological internalism from methodological internalism (1994, 120). According to ontological internalism, an agent is justified in believing that P only if the grounds

internalism and externalism are the sorts of views the Pyrrhonist will investigate critically by comparing and contrasting arguments for and against them. In fact, the Pyrrhonist will observe that there is substantial disagreement among these conceptions—one insists that to know something, we need to know that we know; the other denies this condition.<sup>7</sup> The Pyrrhonist will identify this disagreement, and will explore it in order to see if he can decide which of these views offers the correct account of knowledge. Both internalists and externalists seem to offer very compelling reasons for their respective positions, but given that what they say is in conflict, their conceptions—as all parties certainly agree—cannot both be true. But how could one choose between these views?

Consider, first, the externalist proposal. Suppose that we think that knowledge typically requires only the presence of a reliable mechanism of belief generation. As long as such a reliable mechanism is in place, the resulting beliefs will eventually produce knowledge, whether the epistemic agent in question knows or not that the relevant mechanism is indeed reliable. However, the internalist will argue, it is not entirely clear whether the agent does have knowledge in this case. After all, the agent is in no position to defend his knowledge claims from criticisms to the effect that it is unclear how he has the relevant piece of knowledge in the first place. To provide a defense against this challenge, the externalist would need to establish the reliability of the knowledge claims in question. But this is something he does not think is, in general, needed.

Of course, a more sophisticated externalist may grant that knowledge does require the reflective capacity to determine the reliability of our belief formation mechanisms.<sup>8</sup> But this move would, in fact, blur the distinction between externalism and internalism. A reflective externalist of this sort is, in effect, an internalist, since he grants the crucial role of establishing the reliability of the processes of belief formation.

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that justify this belief are contents of the agent's mind. According to methodological internalism, an agent is justified in believing that *P* only if the agent bases his belief on the grounds that justify it. There are also corresponding externalist formulations for each of these views. The discussion that follows is neutral on this way of formulating the internalist/externalist debate.

<sup>7</sup> As noted, there are also corresponding formulations for internalist and externalist accounts of epistemic justification (see, e.g., BonJour & Sosa 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Ernie Sosa has correctly emphasized the importance of this reflective capacity to characterize and obtain knowledge (see Sosa 2007).



But perhaps the rustic externalist—who does not include a reflective component on his requirement for knowledge, and only demands a reliable source of belief generation—will resist this move. Can we know something without being in a position to defend the corresponding knowledge claim against possible counterexamples? Intuitively, the rustic externalist insists, I can know something without knowing how I know it. For instance, in principle I can know that Barak Obama is the current president of the US without presumably knowing how I know that. I may have completely forgotten how the knowledge in question was obtained. As long as it was obtained in a reliable manner, I will typically have the knowledge in question.

This is arguably a not very plausible position, the internalist will insist. I should in principle be able to indicate the source of that knowledge, or at least how it can be independently checked. In fact, it seems to be an almost self-defeating position to claim that I know *P*, but I'm completely unable to indicate either how I came to know *P* or how *P* could be independently checked. If I am entirely unable to perform such acts, it will be perfectly reasonable to challenge that I have the relevant piece of knowledge in the first place.

The reasonableness of this move suggests that it is at least a necessary requirement to have a certain piece of knowledge that I should be able to support it if challenged. This is something that both the internalist and the sophisticated externalist emphasize. The rustic externalist, however, is unable to follow them here, given that in general he imposes no such constraints on knowledge. The internalist (and the sophisticated externalist) can then use this fact to challenge the adequacy of the rustic externalist's account.

In response, the rustic externalist criticizes what he takes to be extraordinarily high demands imposed by internalists (including sophisticated externalists) on knowledge. It is perfectly possible, the rustic externalist insists, to have knowledge without being able to defend the relevant piece of knowledge from various potential criticisms: even if I'm unable to indicate the source of a given piece of knowledge or where it can be independently checked, I still have the knowledge in question. For example, suppose that for the last 10 years every Saturday morning I've run 10 miles. That's something I have invariably done, independently of weather or motivation. I've kept no record of these runs, though, and it's no longer possible to independently check them. Do I know that I've run on Saturday, October 4, 2003? The externalist will insist that I know, even though I cannot give the source of that piece of knowledge or offer a way of inde-

pendently checking it. Clearly I have no recollection of what happened in the morning of October 4, 2003, and there's no record that indicates that I have run that morning. Still, the rustic externalist insists, I know.

What we have here are two fundamentally distinct requirements on knowledge: those advanced by the rustic externalist, on the one hand, and those found in internalism (including sophisticated externalism), on the other. The Pyrrhonist will expose the disagreement between these views, and will indicate that a defense of one of them often involves begging the question against the other. For example, the internalist (or the sophisticated externalist) will insist that in the case of my Saturday runs, I simply lack the knowledge that I've run on October 4, 2003. It's perfectly possible that I have forgotten that I skipped some Saturday runs in the last 10 years—there are about 500 runs to consider! What the internalist is challenging in this case is the reliability of the process used to form my beliefs about my Saturday runs. However, even if the process were reliable, the internalist would insist, one needs to know that the process is indeed reliable in order to be in a position to defend knowledge claims that emerge from this process against potential challenges. But this is precisely the sort of requirement that the externalist does not include in his account of knowledge. To insist on the indispensability of such a requirement amounts to begging the question against the rustic externalist.

The rustic externalist, in turn, points out that the condition on knowledge advocated by the internalist is unreasonably demanding. Internalism ultimately just invites a dramatic limitation in the scope of our knowledge. Even in the case of my Saturday runs, the externalist will insist, internalism will force us to retract an otherwise perfectly legitimate knowledge claim. And sadly the same will happen again and again in other contexts. However, as long as there is a reliable mechanism of belief formation, the externalist emphasizes, we will typically have knowledge—and there's something to be said for preserving such knowledge. In advocating a less stringent condition on knowledge, the externalist obtains, not surprisingly, a significant amount of knowledge according to his standards. But these standards are not stringent enough for the internalist, who insists that no piece of knowledge is really lost here: one cannot lose what one didn't have! In claiming that I had knowledge in the case of my Saturday runs, it is the externalist who now begs the question against the internalist.

There are powerful intuitions about knowledge behind each of these views. The rustic externalist provides a distinctive account that provides

broader requirements on knowledge, thus characterizing more items as knowledge. The internalist, in turn, is more demanding, and insists that knowledge is not so easy to come by.

Faced with the deep disagreement between internalists and externalists, the Pyrrhonist will, first, invoke internalist concerns to criticize externalism; he will then invoke externalist concerns to criticize internalism—along the lines sketched in the last few paragraphs. Second, the Pyrrhonist will indicate considerations that favor each view—preserving ordinary cases of knowledge, in one case; indicating that knowledge is not, after all, so easy to obtain, in the other. In the end, the Pyrrhonist notes, it is not clear how to resolve the issue between these two views. By using the modes of Agrippa, and being unable to decide between these views—not believing in internalism, not believing in externalism—the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment.

But can the Pyrrhonist consistently suspend judgment about both internalism and externalism? It may be argued that he can't. Since the Pyrrhonist does not believe in internalism, the argument goes, presumably he then believes in its negation. After all, if one does not believe that *P*, then typically one believes that not-*P* (unless one has no opinion as to whether *P* or not-*P* is the case). But the negation of internalism is a form of externalism.<sup>9</sup> It would then seem to follow that by not believing in internalism, the Pyrrhonist would believe in externalism. However, this is clearly inconsistent with the Pyrrhonist's disbelief in externalism, given his suspension of judgment about the issue (which emerges from the fact that he neither believes in externalism nor believes in its negation).

This argument, however, doesn't go through. As noted above, the principle according to which not believing that *P* entails believing that not-*P* does *not* hold in the case in which one has no beliefs about whether *P* or not-*P* is the case. Given that the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment on the internalism/externalism dispute, and hence has no beliefs about the relevant issue, the principle in question clearly cannot be applied here, and the argument above is blocked.

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<sup>9</sup> Recall that for the purposes of the present discussion, internalism about knowledge is characterized by the adoption of the KK-thesis. The negation of the latter thesis amounts to a form of (rustic) externalism, since it is then acknowledged that one need not know that one knows in order to have knowledge.

#### 4. Conclusion

With these considerations, the Pyrrhonist indicates why it would be rash to conclude at this point that either side of the debate between internalists and externalists is correct. Despite the now long-lasting disagreement between the corresponding views, it is unclear that we are anywhere near settling such a dispute.

The Pyrrhonist may suggest a different stance. Settling the dispute may not be necessary to improve our understanding of the complexities and subtleties involved in knowledge. By comparing and contrasting externalism and internalism, the Pyrrhonist displays the increased understanding that emerges from examining the limitations and advantages of these views. In this way, we have here a distinctive way of making sense of the debate. There's no need to decide the latter to obtain what is likely to be its most significant outcome: improved understanding. Even if in the end neither internalism nor externalism is correct, we get a better sense of how we can think about knowledge by exploring what follows, in turn, if one or the other of these views were true.

And then, as always, the Pyrrhonist continues investigating.

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